

What advantages can be leveraged by offering a *Spanish for Heritage Learners* class as an elective to Spanish speaking long-term English language learners in middle school?

by

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

It goes against my nature as an English as a Second Language teacher and an advocate of bilingual learners to refuse a child an opportunity to further their education in language. However I find myself doing just that around January when the seventh and eighth grade students choose the following year's elective classes, like this conversation with Maria:

Maria: *"I'm going to sign up for Spanish next year."*

Me: *"Well, that class is not for you because you speak Spanish already."*

Maria: *"Yes, but I don't speak it very well and I don't know how to read or write in Spanish."*

Me: *"They won't let you sign up for it, because it is for beginners in Spanish. You can sign up for a Heritage Spanish Class at High School."*

Maria and countless students like her are disappointed and confused that they cannot take a Spanish class as an elective in seventh and eighth grade. They do not feel competent in their first language (L1), because they have learned it as an oral language and are not literate in that language. Spanish as a world language class offered at some middle schools is not an appropriate class for them. It is designed as a Spanish class for monolingual English speakers learning basic vocabulary and language. The students whose L1 is Spanish are fluent in spoken Spanish and have an intrinsic understanding of grammar, appropriate tense and aspect, and noun genders. They also have established

socio-language skills, meaning they can use the Spanish language intuitively in different contexts.

Conversations like the one above are what first interested me in this Capstone Project. I had first heard of Heritage Spanish classes that were offered in high schools. Their content varies, but the key ethos is to teach literacy in Spanish to native Spanish speakers. The more I learned about Heritage Spanish classes, the more I wanted to challenge the status quo in the district I work in of having to wait until high school before formally studying Spanish. Why should monolingual English speakers have the opportunity to learn Spanish before Spanish literacy classes are offered to our bilingual population in middle school?

This line of thought helped me focus my capstone question of *what advantages can be leveraged by offering a Spanish for Heritage Learners class as an elective to Spanish speaking long-term English language learners in middle school?*

My research question led me to examine the known and potential benefits of offering Spanish heritage language classes in middle school and to consider how I could advocate on behalf of my students and convince my school district to add these classes as an elective course in middle school for our bilingual students. My capstone project is the creation of a series of presentations that could be easily adapted for other districts to use to establish Spanish as a heritage language in their schools. By engaging in conversations and increasing the number of heritage language offerings in schools, this will provide more research and evidential opportunities for the teaching profession.

### **Spanish as a Heritage Language Class**

This type of class is becoming more prevalent at the high school level in answer to the requests from the population of students who speak Spanish at home as a first or second language. Although those learners are fluent Spanish speakers and listeners, they do not have the skills to read and write in Spanish at a comparable level. Teaching heritage learners is not the same as teaching learners of a foreign language. It could be more closely correlated to an English speaker taking an English language arts class rather than English as a foreign language class. Spanish as a heritage language class recognizes the skill set in which students already have competency and addresses the literacy elements of reading and writing that students are still developing. In the experience of this author, these courses teach those literacy skills through the lens of content that focuses on Latin American culture, identity, and history. I know that these classes are anecdotally proving to have strong benefits for learners in terms of bilingual literacy, progress towards proficiency in English, and an academic self concept. As a middle school teacher, I naturally questioned why these classes are not available at the middle school level and why our learners have to wait until high school in order to start their journey to literacy in their home language?

### **Long-term English Language Learners**

This capstone considers the population of students that are known as long-term English language learners (ELLs). Books and research studies have questioned the key to success that could be nurtured in this group of learners who appear to lack motivation and academic literacy skills. In my personal opinion, this group is struggling with identity.

They are first or second generation children of Spanish speaking immigrants - for the most part, American born. They identify as Latinx<sup>1</sup> without maybe ever having visited their family's country of origin and they have grown up in an education system that does not value their bilingual skills because they are perceived to not be fully literate in either their L1 or L2. The current political climate is also working to confuse their identity. Self-esteem and self-efficacy are affected when undocumented family members are arrested and families are broken apart. Providing students with cultural context through heritage classes and offering them literacy and confidence in their first language may allow them to have pride in their culture and pride in recognition of their bilingual skills. Increasing this group of students' self esteem will allow them to see themselves as successful learners in our school culture and to look ambitiously at the future in terms of a successful college or professional career. It should be noted that this capstone specifically considers the population of long-term ELLs. However, there is a larger group of students that would benefit from Heritage Spanish classes who are not classified as having limited English proficiency. This is a larger group of Spanish speakers who are proficient in English, who however are also emerging bilinguals needing academic and literacy support in their first language.

### **Benefits for Learners**

#### **Bilingual Literacy**

Since the research focus around bilingual learning began in the 1970s, the benefits of bilingual literacy in the elementary grades, in particular K-2, has been widely accepted

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<sup>1</sup> Latinx is a gender neutral term for a person of Latin America origin or descent.



and promoted. Later studies researched the academic advantage of bilingual students learning how to read and write in their heritage language at the high school level, but still nothing at the middle school level. Indeed, as the literature review in Chapter Two presents, middle school seems to be a no-man's land for bilingual language development and research.

In today's global economy, being an employee fluent in two of the most widely spoken languages in the world, Spanish and English, is a highly sought commodity. An often stated criticism of the United States is the lack of language skills available. We have a ready-made pool of bilingual learners in our schools, who for the most part are lacking reading and writing skills. Imagine if this group of learners were provided with the literacy skills they need in their first language while in grade school. They would be ready for the job market at 18 or could go onto college as a biliterate bilingual student. My school district participates in this state's Department of Education's Bilingual/Multilingual Seal, which measures proficiency in a language other than English. The assessments are offered by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages and the standards-based Measurement of Proficiency Assessments (STAMP). These seals are gaining in significance and importance to employers and colleges as confirmation of bilingual literacy. All students subject to their proficiency level are eligible to take the bilingual/multilingual seal assessments, so they could be world language students or heritage language students. Success on these tests allows students to receive High School language graduation requirements or indeed higher education college credits (Minnesota Department of Education, 2018).

**Progress towards proficiency.** Chapter two also examines the Department of Education's education act called Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). In my state, one of five elements that make up ESSA is ELLs' Progress towards proficiency scores on the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs tests. ACCESS (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners) assesses an English learner's proficiency in English across the four language modalities: reading, listening, speaking and writing (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). As I began to consider this capstone, I wondered if by improving literacy in their first language, Spanish speaking ELLs would show a corresponding improvement in literacy in English? I knew that this had been shown to be the case for younger students in the K-2 age range. Would these language transfer skills still apply in older students?

### **Academic Self Concept**

There is a missing piece to the success of the Latinx population in schools as evidenced by the graduation achievement gap. The achievement gap in high school graduation rates for the Hispanic students in my district compared to their white peers is the largest gap among different racial groups (Spotlight, 2019). While we celebrate an overall graduation rate of 90.5% compared to a state average of 83.2%, in 2017/2018, there lurk concerning gaps in achievement. 80.7% of Hispanic students in my school district graduated compared to 92.7% of White students. This also puts them 1.6% behind the African American students. The breakdown report used does not separate English language learners by first language, but we can see that as a group, they have a

graduation rate of 75.3% (Spotlight, 2019). It should be noted that the EL population at high school often includes students with limited or interrupted formal education and we would therefore reasonably expect a significant impact from that on the graduation rates. Even when we consider statewide rates, Hispanic students are still at the lowest graduation rate of 66.8% statewide, compared to 88.4% of white students (Spotlight 2019).

We need to identify how to improve the self concept of this group of learners into one that perceives academic success and in particular bilingual academic success becoming part of their identity and their future. Chapter two presents studies that have directly correlated a positive academic self concept with academic success.

### **Chapter Overviews**

Chapter two reviews the academic literature that attempts to answer the research question, *what advantages can be leveraged by offering a Spanish for Heritage Learners class as an elective to Spanish speaking long-term English language learners in middle school?* Research included in chapter two provides background on student profiles of heritage language learners, focusing in particular on a group referred to as Long-Term ELLs. The research is reviewed on two key learning characteristics of those groups, being bilingual literacy, and cultural identity. Finally heritage language classes and the potential benefits of those classes towards academic English language proficiency is presented.

Chapter three goes on to detail the project that emanated from my review of the literature. My project for this Capstone is to prepare five formal presentations, stemming

from this research question. The first audience will be the Superintendent and School Board of the school district in which I work, which is a suburban independent school district in the Upper Midwest. This presentation will be given at a board meeting with a view to the consideration of introducing Heritage Language classes at the middle school level. In support of this presentation, I will write four additional supporting presentations on this research question which will address the other stakeholders, namely heritage language speaking middle school students, parents of heritage language students, English as a second language teacher colleagues and administrators with a world language teacher focus.

Chapter four ends this Capstone by providing a conclusion and reflection on the capstone process, including my learnings and reflections and in addition will consider the five presentations written on this research question for both implications and potential uses for other educators. Full scripts of the five presentations will be included in the appendices of this capstone.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

This literature review seeks to set the informative stage for my capstone project by considering the capstone question, *what advantages can be leveraged by offering a Spanish for Heritage Learners class as an elective to Spanish speaking long-term English language learners in middle school?* using the existing research. First, definitions of heritage language speakers, and more specifically long-term English language learners are reviewed. Following those definitions, research is presented on bilingual literacy, progress toward proficiency in academic English, and cultural identity. Finally, research around heritage language classes is reviewed and the advantages for Spanish speaking long-term English language learners in those classes.

### Heritage Language Learners

In 2017 in the United States of America there were 12 million school-aged children who were raised speaking at least one other language than English at home (Carreira and Kagan, 2017), a total that represented 22% of the country's student population. At over one fifth, this was a significant pool of potential bilingual students and consequently future bilingual employees in the country's workforce. Currently, this group of students, namely heritage language learners, is largely being failed by the education system. Heritage language learners are easily identifiable, yet their specific needs are often missing in the debate about literacy and the achievement gap (Peregoy & Boyle, 2000).

Research in the field of heritage language was pioneered by Valdes in the late 1970's and onwards (as cited in Carreira 2012). Alongside the research, Valdes led a summer

institute in 1978, offered by the National Endowment for the Humanities which produced syllabi for heritage language classes, and with colleague Teschner, wrote the first textbook for heritage Spanish speakers, called *Español escrito: curso para hispanohablantes bilingües* or Written Spanish: a course for bilingual Spanish speakers (Valdes and Teschner 1998). Valdes (as cited in Peyton, Ranard and McGinnis Eds Heritage Languages in America, 2001) suggested the following three main criteria for identifying heritage language students:

- raised in homes where a non-English language is spoken;
- speak or merely understand the heritage language; and
- are to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language. (2001, p.38)

Across the nation, Spanish is the largest non-English language spoken (Freeman, 2002). Heritage students are either born into homes of immigrants already living in the U.S. or could be second and third generation. They also could be students who immigrated as children and possibly started their education in their home language, but continued it in the United States (Freeman, 2002). Heritage language learners have strong oral skills, however, are not literate in their home language - they cannot read or write in their L1, but can potentially converse and behave socio-linguistically as a native speaker (Freeman, 2002; Valdes 2004). Not all heritage language learners are fully bilingual orally in their home language. They are often missing vocabulary and use the English version of the word peppered into their conversations. The opposite is also true - they can be missing the English word and use the L1 word instead (Freeman, 2002).

In Collier's (1987) discussion on longitudinal research and the number of years it takes to become L2 (English) proficient across different age groups, Collier found that eight to eleven year-olds were the fastest achievers, requiring two to five years to reach the 50th percentile on national norms in all subject areas. In contrast, children arriving as twelve to fifteen year-olds experienced the most difficulty, requiring as much as six to eight years to attain grade level norms. A generally accepted time-frame for second language acquisition is on average four to eight years across age groups. (Collier, 1987)

Academic language development is crucial for success in schools. This involves not only specific vocabulary, but also sentence and discourse constructs in both reading and writing. Cummins (1979) originated the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (commonly known as BICS) versus Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) distinction. BICS is used for day to day conversational and social interactions, whereas CALP is more abstract and is necessary to discuss academic content in the classroom context. Often, heritage language learners are perceived to be proficient in L2 long before these students actually are, because they have strong BICS language skills in both languages. As they are not being educated in their home language, they do not develop the CALP skills in the L1. They have to develop CALP in a second language without a reference language for that in L1 their first language (Cummins, 2000).

Language acquisition is also dependent on the speaker's connection or social position to the second language and their personality. Socioculturally, heritage language learners vary in their propensity to acquire a second language. If they do not recognize or consider themselves part of the dominant language culture, this reduces their motivation to learn

(Ogbu, 1991). These students are often living in L1-speaking only worlds, where the L2 is spoken only during the school day. Personality also has a positive or negative effect on language acquisition. Some learners have a higher affective filter than others (Krashen, 1982), which slows down their propensity to learn an L2. Students that are wary of making mistakes will not put themselves in a position of potential failure, whereas students with a lower affective filter will have more opportunities to learn from mistakes they are comfortable in making.

There are societal implications of educating our immigrant and second or third generation immigrants to their full bilingual potential. The world is now a global economy where communication and language skills are in high demand. The United States already has a fifth of the school population who are potential bilingual speakers. (Carreira & Kagan, 2017) They have written and academic language skills to acquire, but their cultural position and linguistic strengths are a huge advantage. In order to prepare an educated workforce for the future and improve the multi-language skills of the country, the language and cultural proficiencies that heritage language students bring has to be valued. Within the current educational system, there is a higher drop-out rate, and a large achievement gap for students with limited English proficiency (Carreira and Beeman, 2014). Therefore, a large number of heritage language speakers are not experiencing success in school. Research needs to identify the strategies or tools needed that will allow heritage language speaking students to be successful and to reach their full bilingual potential.



Rather than search for a magic bullet, researchers agree that language classes be provided in the home language to some extent throughout the K-12 education of the child. Given that one fifth of students in American schools speak a language other than English at home, Carreira and Kagan (2017) insisted on heritage language education being mainstreamed in the future. This capstone focuses on a particular section within the larger group of heritage language learners, students that are referred to as long-term English language learners.

### **Long-term English Language Learners**

Some students who struggle to exhibit English language proficiency and who remain in English language learner service longer than the average seem to have common denominators and are identified as long-term English language learners (long-term ELLs). Students classified as limited English proficient (LEP) make up about a third of the bilingual students in the USA (Carreira & Kagan, 2017; Freeman, 2002). Of those LEP students, about 75% are Spanish speakers (Freeman, 2002). They are second or third generation bilinguals who were born in the USA, raised in Spanish speaking homes and are neither literate in Spanish as their L1 nor English as their L2. In contrast with their Native English speaking counterparts who know about 10,000 words and approximately 90% of language structures by age 6, minority language speakers have to learn to read words they do not recognize. A key element of early literacy is making the connection between the spoken and the printed word. If you are not using that oral language, this delays this concept development and students have to learn vocabulary at the same time as the reading skills (Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux 2010). The longitudinal study by

Mancilla-Martinez and Lesaux (2010) concluded that in fifth grade, Spanish speakers could read words correctly, but had a low comprehension level - that of two to three grades lower. These learners are not being taught what they need, rather what first language students need. By middle school, they remain two to four grade levels behind their peers. They are never able to catch up, because that would require them to progress more in one year than their peers (Mancilla-Martinez and Lesaux 2010).

Long-term ELLs are students who are neither academically literate in their L1 nor English. Freeman (2002) defined them as, “students who have been in this country for several years, but who have not developed high levels of literacy in either their first language or English” (p.2). These students typically underperform compared with their English speaking peers in reading and writing skills. They are reading and writing below grade level which makes texts across the content areas in secondary school inaccessible (Freeman, 2002). This negatively affects their academic success, their self identity, and their college or career possibilities in the future. Many of these students were born in the United States into Spanish speaking families. ELLs are considered long-term when they have been receiving EL language instruction for seven years or more (Freeman 2002).

Ogbu (as cited in Freeman, 2002) commented that long-term ELLs are part of a group he calls involuntary minorities, - families that have lived in the United States of America for more than one generation and self identify with their cultural group. They have no plans to return to their home country, because the USA is their home country, and there is no incentive to develop skills they could use in their home country. In addition, these families tend to come from low socio-economic backgrounds and do not have role

models who went on to college, or who even completed a high school education. Those that did finish a college education have moved out of their neighborhoods, so school-age students don't get to see the lifestyle change that an education can bring. Consequently, education has a low perceived value. Involuntary minorities also recognize a dominant white culture and feel powerless to succeed where they are in the minority, so their motivation is decreased by the feeling of an imbalance in society (Ogbu, as cited in Freeman, 2002).

Rumbaut, Massey and Bean, 2006 suggested that there are two critical elements for an immigrant's language to survive, namely a preference to speaking it in the home and their self perceived skill level in that language (they speak it *very well*). In immigrant families, native language is typically lost by the third generation (Rumbaut, Massey and Bean, 2006). This research implied that if we don't encourage our emerging bilingual students to learn their heritage language, they will lose the skills they currently have. Our education system is very focused on English proficiency, and not on heritage language proficiency.

The skill level of a student's English proficiency is identified annually (Minnesota Department of Education n.d.). Heritage language speakers who are designated as Limited English Proficiency are tested each year on their English proficiency level. In the six upper midwest states (with the exception of Iowa), students take the English language proficiency test called ACCESS (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners), implemented by the WIDA consortium. The WIDA consortium covers 40 US states, territories and federal agencies

(WIDA, n.d.). In order to be successful and exit the ELL program, students must demonstrate proficiency on the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs test. The threshold for proficiency is set by each state independently, and is calculated by scores in each of the four tested modalities (reading, listening, speaking and writing) and a composite score. WIDA research on long-term ELLs define those as students who qualify for language support services for six or more years without reaching an overall composite proficiency level of 4.5 on ACCESS for ELLs (Sahakyan and Ryan for WIDA, 2018). Long-term ELLs usually fall in the level three to four range of six, where one is considered new to country and six is considered an academically successful native-like speaker of English. There has been research into the most effective way of moving them over this plateau from the three to four range. Freeman (2002) focused on this group of learners and recommended the following four strategies to accelerate their literacy:

1. Engage students in challenging, theme-based curriculum to develop academic concepts
2. Draw on students' background - their experiences, cultures and languages
3. Organize collaborative activities and scaffold instruction to build students' academic English proficiency
4. Create confident students who value school and value themselves as learners (p. 16)

Heritage language classes are one solution that addresses three of those four key strategies. There are many varieties of classes that fall under the umbrella of heritage language classes, which are considered later in this chapter. Academic improvements in

literacy in both Spanish and English is the end goal for our students; how to measure that proficiency in our English language learners is one of the key focus areas of the latest federal achievement program, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which we review next.

### **Every Student Succeeds Act**

*Progress towards proficiency* is the new measurement under ESSA used to measure an English Learner student's year to year progress in English. Federal and state guidelines often dictate the spending decisions of school districts rather than best instructional practice indicated by research. In order to increase spending on heritage languages, it will be important to show progress. One federal method of measuring progress in English language growth for English language learners is *progress towards proficiency*. In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act, commonly known as ESSA, replaced the US education policy known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). 2018/19 was its first year of implementation. In Minnesota, the accountability data is organized in a system called North Star. English language learners (students designated as Limited English Proficiency (LEP)) are one of the specific groups of students whose progress is being tracked by North Star, with regard to ESSA (Minnesota Department of Education n.d.). One of North Star's accountability indicators is progress toward English language proficiency, as measured by WIDA ACCESS scores. Individual growth targets are calculated for LEP students, based on their age when they were identified as LEP and when they are reasonably expected to exit service (Minnesota Department of Education, n.d.)

In order to increase public spending on heritage language learning, policy makers generally need to see results. From the review of literature in this chapter, it appears that research studies on most topics at the middle school age group are less prevalent than elementary or high school. The new federal education act, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides for closer monitoring using progress towards proficiency rather than straightforward growth (Minnesota Department of Education n.d.). Progress towards proficiency of LEP students establishes an anticipated growth pattern that would plan for exit from EL services at a certain year. Between the initial year and the projected year of exit, annual increments in progress are identified using raw ACCESS scores, in order to compare growth year to year. There is currently only one year of this data to review, however going forward, this would seem to be a powerful tool to be able to use and measure growth when students were enrolled in bilingual education or heritage language classes.

Circling back to the research review on long-term ELLs, bilingual literacy is considered next and how second language acquisition theories, applicable to heritage language learners, help frame best practices of how to improve English language proficiency.

### **Bilingual Literacy**

Literacy is generally accepted as the ability to read and write in a language. Bilingual literacy would therefore be the ability to read and write in two languages. Bilingual students can be categorized as being fully bilingual, balanced bilingual (having the same skills in L1 and L2) or unbalanced bilingual (having different skills in L1 and L2). In

order to fully understand bilingual literacy and to place it in the context of the research question, *what advantages can be leveraged by offering Spanish as a heritage language class as an elective to Spanish speaking long-term English language learners in middle school*, this section will review the underlying second language acquisition tenets of transfer and language interdependence.

### **Effects of Literacy in a First Language on Literacy in a Second Language**

There has been considerable research into the transfer of L1 literacy skills to L2 literacy skills. Before literacy can be considered specifically, there are five meta-analyses identified by Goldenberg and Coleman (2010) that all concluded that teaching in a student's primary language promotes their achievement in English. The effects were modest, but significant in each meta-analysis. For this paper, there is a bias towards research with elementary age students, however some studies involving secondary students were also included. A significant longitudinal study carried out by Thomas and Collier (2002) on academic achievement related to instructional method included secondary students. Three of the five urban and suburban school districts included were sites that provided some degree of instruction in Spanish. They found that dual language programs in varying formats and percentages of instruction in L1 were the only programs with outcomes of students reaching the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile in both L1 and L2 in all subjects. In other programs, students never caught up on the achievement gap. They confidently conclude that the strongest predictor of high achievement in L2 comes from those who have received more L1 grade-level schooling (Thomas & Collier, 2002).

In one of Freeman's (2002) case studies, they noticed that if a student has not developed an academic language register in their first language, it takes them longer to develop that academic language in English. In contrast to students who have been born in the USA or came as young children, newly arrived older English language learners may have developed academic language in their first language at school in their home country. This makes it easier for those learners with academic language in their first language to use English in that way, because they understand how academic language works. (Freeman 2002). Cummins (2000) identified that without a solid foundation in the native language (L1), ELLs will struggle with academic progress in the target language (L2). This affects long-term English language learners who are not gaining proficiency in English, because they are missing written language structure, in particular academic language, in their first language.

Hudelson (1987) was part of the original group of researchers studying *native language literacy*. This researcher is a proponent of the bilingual education model that advocated for initial native language literacy, followed by literacy instruction in L2, "Whatever the native language, literacy in that language will benefit English literacy." (Hudelson, 1987, p. 839). Being literate in L1 also has effects on positive self concepts and positive view of school (Modiano, 1968). Rosier and Holm (2005) completed a longitudinal study that showed children enrolled in first language literacy programs had better or equal achievements than peers not enrolled in first language literacy programs.



Many studies have proven the advantage of learning to read in one's first language and that reading skills readily transfer across languages and do not need to be retaught (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010, Cummins 1981).

### **Cummins' Second Language Acquisition Theory of Language Interdependence**

The majority of this research stems from Jim Cummins' (1981) theories of second language acquisition. Cummins (1981) posited that with motivation and exposure, concepts transfer from one language to another because students develop a common underlying language proficiency. This is known as the interdependence theory. If a language concept is understood in a student's first language, the same concept does not have to be relearned. The vocabulary of the second language has to be learned, but not the skill itself. The skill exists for use in both languages (Freeman 2002). Based on the meta-analysis conducted by the National Literacy Panel on Language, minority children and youth, higher order literacy skills, such as higher order reading comprehension and strategy use - both required at the secondary level of education, fall in line with Cummins' interdependence theory (August and Shanahan, 2008).

Cummins is a foundational researcher in the field of second language acquisition. Cummins' (1981) interdependence theory on bilingual proficiency explains that there is a common underlying language proficiency that both L1 and L2 share. This shared proficiency includes academic skills in literacy, for example reading strategies. If a student learns an academic skill in one language, that skill forms part of the common underlying language proficiency that is shared between both languages. The student only

needs to learn that skill one time and in one language. The skill will transfer into the second language automatically given adequate exposure and adequate maintenance.

Cummins' theory of common underlying language proficiency is sometimes represented as a Dual Iceberg where a bilingual speaker has two languages represented as distinct "icebergs" or triangles rising above a dotted horizontal line representing the surface features of a language. The surface features of a language are the visible linguistic skills of a bilingual speaker. Cummins' theory can be represented by a speaker having equal skills in both their first language (L1) and their second language (L2) - note that this is rarely the case. Underneath the surface features line is a large triangular shaped area where the two languages overlap. This represents the common underlying proficiency of a bilingual speaker - this is all of his or her academic skills used to understand or create language. The proficiencies of L1 and L2 that are underneath the surface features are skills or tasks that are still cognitively challenging to the bilingual learner, however are transferable across language learning.

This second language acquisition theory of the interdependence between cognitive and language strategies between L1 and L2 is accepted as an explanation as to why skills acquired in one language do not have to be retaught in a second language (Cummins 1981). When viewing heritage language classes through this knowledge, it can be understood how learning to read and write in one language can assist literacy in a second language. Durgunoglu (2002), in his summary of literature on cross-language transfer effects in literacy, identified the domains of transfer as phonological awareness, syntactic awareness, functional awareness, decoding, decontextualized language, knowledge of

writing conventions, and reading comprehension strategies. These are examples of the skills that Cummins explained as *underlying language proficiencies* that are common to both or all languages that a person speaks.

Turning to specifically consider the transfer of writing skills, Lanauze and Snow (1989), found that strong writing skills may also be linked to good writing skills in L1. Their study with upper elementary students found that Spanish speaking ELLs were able to use Spanish discourse level knowledge when writing in English. These students had a lower level of oral language skills in English, but were able to transfer the discourse skills from their Spanish writing into their English writing.

There are calls for further research and in particular at the secondary level. August and Shanahan (2008) identified a lack of research in first-language literacy and second-language literacy in the secondary grades. In addition, studies are needed to note if first-language literacy is linked to academic achievement across the content areas of mathematics, science, and social studies.

In their meta-analysis on ELL program effectiveness research, Rolstad, Mahoney and Glass (2005) strongly concluded that bilingual education was more beneficial for EL students than education in English only. They also agreed with the conclusions reached in the meta-analyses conducted by Greene (1997) and Willig (1985) that bilingual education was superior at improving not only English academic achievement, but also achievement in the first language of its enrolled students when compared to all-English education.

## Cultural Identity

Language and identity are closely intertwined. Language and how it is spoken sends a message to the world. The past decade has seen a growth of interest in research on the interaction between language and identity (Leeman 2015). Spanish speaking students may identify as Mexican, or Mexican American. Language can play a part in how *Mexican* someone is considered depending on their linguistic ability. As a 2nd or 3rd generation Mexican American who is not a fluent Spanish speaker or who has a *white* accent, a personal claim to Mexican heritage may be weakened by a lower level of Spanish proficiency. Leeman (2015) also considered how a language can have negative connotations and questioned how this affects a student's identity, to be associated with a language that the dominant society links to illegal immigration or being a racialized minority. When added into that mix how adolescents are developmentally learning about who they are and going through puberty, that creates many layers of identity to work through (Danzak, 2011).

Heritage language curricula is typically centered around identity as it explores the cultures of the target language through texts and history (Leeman 2015). Heritage language classes also include discussion of language types and status. This allows students to view themselves as students on a meta level in their literacy journey (Leeman 2015). Also raised in Leeman's 2015 paper on *Heritage Language Education and Identity in the United States* was an analysis of the term *heritage language*. Some consider the word *heritage* to have historical connotations, rather than using a name for the class linked to the term bilingualism. The term heritage may subjugate the Spanish

language to English instead of using bilingual which carries prestige and academic connotations.

In her 2011 paper on *Identity and Activism in Heritage Language Education*, Leeman considered how identity affected educational success. Leeman wrote that positive feelings about one's first language led to academic success. This has also been measured in that when the home language is still being spoken and maintained in the 2nd and 3rd generation of immigrant families, there is a correlation with academic success. Beaudrie (2018) studied academic self concept as it pertains specifically to heritage language learners in the postsecondary setting. Part of a person's cultural identity is academic self concept, which is how someone evaluates or perceives themselves as learners, and Beaudrie (2018) broke this down further by considering literacy and its components specifically. Beaudrie (2018) studied self concept and performance to note if a positive academic self concept predicted performance. This study confirmed that as performance level increased, academic self concept increased across reading, writing, and spelling domains and conclusions were drawn that self concept plays a significant role in students' performances. Teachers should therefore focus attention on academic self concept as they do on a student's performance. If students have a low image of themselves as a literate learner in their L1, that will affect their academic success. Having low skills in their first language also affects the core of their identity. Beaudrie (2018) quoted a study by Pajares (2003) who researched that students perceptions about themselves are very influential on success or failure academically. Students with low self concepts avoided doing what they perceived to be difficult tasks and those with high self

concepts took a chance and challenged themselves. Teachers should also be aware that heritage language students may be insecure about their language skills because they do not use it in an academic setting, like they do English. Danzak (2011) added to this discussion by helping learners develop a social identity as learners, so they felt at home in settings that valued literacy. They also needed to be supported by providing tools such as books and writing opportunities in their home language, so it developed as an academic language. Therefore educational institutes should value and acknowledge the home language, Leeman (2011).

Having reviewed the literature on the learning characteristics and needs of heritage language learners, this analysis was used to prepare a capstone project that answers the question, *what advantages can be leveraged by offering Spanish as a heritage language class as an elective to Spanish speaking long-term English language learners in middle school?* Now this review concentrates on heritage language classes and how research has shown they can provide advantages for Spanish speaking long-term English language learners in those classes.

### **Heritage Language Classes**

Kelleher (2010) defined a heritage language program as “any language development program that is designed or tailored to address the needs of heritage language learners” (p.1). Kagan and Dillon (2001) described heritage language instruction as a legitimate subsystem of foreign language instruction. Falling under the world language umbrella, these classes are marketed as heritage language classes, or in the instance of the Latinx population, Spanish for Spanish-speakers. Heritage language classes can take the form of

a dual language classroom where instruction is split between English and Spanish, as an elective in middle or high school, as a formative and summative assessment language in an L2 school, or as basic as having instructions provided in both languages.

Valdes (1997) suggested that the initial goal of Spanish for Native Speakers instruction was to develop language skills in Spanish speakers that would allow them to participate in advanced placement courses in Spanish, with a strong focus on grammatical correctness. She argued that instruction must move beyond grammar to a focus on teaching students to function effectively in oral and written discourse, including in professional settings. Kagan and Dillon (2001) agreed that students who grew up speaking their native language (L1) had great strengths in the language's sociolinguistic functions and in appropriate tense/aspect use and word gender. The weaknesses of heritage Spanish speakers lay in the academic language and discourse and how to add cohesion to ideas in both the spoken and written format. Heritage classes as secondary elective classes have the goal of developing reading and writing skills using culturally relevant texts. Peregoy and Boyle (2000) confirmed that students have higher levels of comprehension when the texts feature an area or issue in which they have background knowledge.

Academic improvement in heritage language classes has been shown to be present in different ratios of L1 to L2. Khan (2015) completed a study in Pakistan on the effectiveness of providing task instructions in both L1 and L2 compared to a control group who received instructions in L2 only. Significant positive learning outcomes on a test were achieved in the study by the students who were taught in both languages.

Teaching in L2 (English) is commonplace in Pakistan, so that students can improve the weakness of their L2, by immersing them in that language. However, Khan's (2015) study advised that teaching in both languages should be used as an instructional tool. This study suggested that even by only providing instructions or questions in both L1 and L2, this tool or strategy would positively affect the academic success of students. In addition the students receiving bilingual instruction may have had a psychological advantage during the test taking, because they perhaps felt more comfortable with the L1 instructions.

Gandara and Merino (1993) closed their investigation of LEP assessment with the question of why are we not asking which program provides the highest level of proficiency in both languages and an eagerness to learn. In other words the focus of our education system is usually on proficiency in English and not proficiency in both home language in addition to English. Jimenez (2003) suggested that there is a barrier to shifting society's thinking towards bilingualism being a resource and not a handicap. We label our ELL students with deficit language such as *Limited English Proficient*, instead of a more asset based label like *Developing Bilingual*. There is ample academic research to back dual language programs at the elementary level, however these are not readily available or supported politically by funding (Jimenez 2003). There is an incongruity between our economy needing a bilingual workforce and setting up an education system to succeed in developing successful bilingual speakers and writers.



### Summary

Chapter two reviewed a large body of research papers that all conclude that teaching in a student's primary language promotes their achievement in English as a second language. This research has a bias towards elementary aged students, however the studies with secondary students reached the same conclusion. Both bilingual literacy, improved cultural identity, and higher academic self concept are key advantages that can be leveraged by offering a *Spanish for Heritage Learners* class as an elective to Spanish speaking long-term English language learners in middle school.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Project Description

Chapter Two provided an evaluation of the current literature on the important issues to consider when answering the research question of *what advantages can be leveraged by offering Spanish as a Heritage Language class as an elective to Spanish speaking long-term English language learners in middle school?* The literature review considered each element of the research question: the phenomenon of long-term ELLs - with a focus on those with Spanish as their first language, and theories about bilingual learners. Chapter two ended with an investigation of Heritage Language classes and their availability. There is evidence that Heritage Language classes improve bilingual literacy and academic self concept of long-term ELLs, and the author will now use that information in five presentations to different stakeholder audiences. The keynote presentation will be to the Superintendent and School Board of an upper midwest school district, with the goal of introducing a Spanish for Heritage Learners class elective at the middle school level. The other four presentations will be:

1. a professional development for secondary English as a second language (ESL) teacher colleagues and Cultural Family Advocates. (ESL will be used to identify teachers, because that is the official name of our licence).
2. an informational presentation to school administration and world language teacher colleagues.
3. an information session for parents about the opportunity and potential of heritage language classes for their children, including a Spanish translation.

4. an information session marketing the class to potential students.

This chapter develops the knowledge gained in chapter two, by detailing the timeline and preparation of five presentations, each to a different stakeholder group in consideration of providing Spanish as a heritage language as an elective class in middle school. First, the backwards design process, as detailed by Wiggins and McTighe (2005), will be introduced and used to identify the desired results of each presentation. Next, adult learning theories are briefly considered in order to learn how to intentionally and effectively present information about English Language Learners to the five different audiences, and finally the author will analyze successful presentation theories, so that relevant materials for each group can be prepared.

#### **Understanding by Design Stage One - Desired Results**

Wiggins and McTighe (2005) have a backwards design theory for effective curriculum design. Although this project does not center around a curriculum, the author has used the Understanding by Design theory to focus on the end goals and the level of comprehension that each audience should have at the end of the presentation. The emphasis of this design theory is on understanding rather than just receiving information through a list of bullet points covered. The Wiggins and McTighe (2005) backwards design theory starts by considering the long-term goals of the specific learning and in doing so, the theory lends itself well as a starting point for designing distinct presentations. Stage One of the Wiggins and McTighe theory is Desired Results and this is the stage most suited to this capstone project which involves distinct stakeholder presentations. This stage considers the essential questions of a unit, allows the author to

clarify the *desired results* while focusing on learners being able to *transfer* skills and *understand* key concepts. In terms of this author's presentation, the essential question for all five presentations will be the research question, *what advantages can be leveraged by offering Spanish for Heritage Learners as an elective to Spanish speaking long-term English language learners in middle school?* After identifying the desired results for each audience, three further areas that may impact the desired results were considered: what existing knowledge the audience already has, what key concepts will the audience learn during the course of the presentation, and lastly what misunderstandings or confusion may arise for each audience. These three areas are considered in brief for each presentation below.

### **Audience One - Superintendent and School Board**

Desired result: The School Board's serious consideration of Spanish for Heritage Learners classes being offered as an elective class across all six middle schools in this suburban school district.

Existing knowledge:

- The Latinx students have a lower graduation rate than other racial groups
- Progress towards proficiency of English language learners is part of the ESSA scorecard

Key concepts to be learned:

- Second language acquisition theory
- Teaching a child to read and write in their first language improves their academic achievement in their second language (English)

- Teaching a child in their first language increases academic self concept and pride in cultural heritage
- Spanish as a Heritage Language classes already exist in the district's high schools.

Potential misunderstandings - the audience may not know/understand:

- the distinction between Spanish as a World Language class and Spanish for Heritage Learners
- that our emergent bilinguals are not literate in Spanish
- that our Spanish speaking students are not all ELLs and yet they are also failing academically

### **Audience Two - Secondary ESL Teacher Colleagues and Cultural Family Advocates**

Desired result: Support for and promotion of Spanish heritage classes as an elective class in middle school in this suburban school district.

Existing knowledge:

- Knowledge of second language acquisition (ESL teacher colleagues)
- Challenges of being a bilingual learner (Cultural Family Advocates)
- Interest expressed by the Spanish speaking community in a Spanish for Heritage Learners class

Key concepts to be learned:

- Talking points of the presentation that they can use to advocate for the introduction of Spanish for Heritage Learners and how to encourage families and students to participate in the class
- Spanish as a Heritage Language classes already exist in the district's high schools
- How they can advocate to offer this class in their school

Potential misunderstandings - the audience may not know/understand:

- that some students may resist this opportunity

### **Audience Three - School Administration and World Language Teachers**

Desired result: Support for and promotion of Spanish heritage classes as an elective class in middle school in this suburban school district.

Existing knowledge:

- The Latinx students have a lower graduation rate than other groups
- Progress towards proficiency of English language learners is part of the ESSA scorecard
- Spanish speaking students have repeatedly expressed interest in a Spanish class
- This is an academically failing population

Key concepts to be learned:

- Second language acquisition theory
- Teaching a child to read and write in their first language improves their academic achievement in their second language (English)
- Teaching a child in their first language increases academic self concept and pride in cultural heritage
- Spanish as a Heritage Language classes already exist in the district's high schools
- How they can advocate to offer this class in their school
- Spanish as a Heritage Language curriculum

Potential misunderstandings - the audience may not know/understand:

- that bilingual students are not fully bilingual, ie not literate in both languages
- that the class is for all emergent bilingual Spanish speakers, not just EL students

- that Spanish for Heritage Learners may be considered a World Language class, not an EL class

#### **Audience Four - Students who are Heritage Language Learners**

Desired result: Students will choose to participate in Spanish heritage classes as an elective class in middle school in this suburban school district.

Existing knowledge:

- They need instruction in Spanish in order to be readers and writers in Spanish
- Challenges of being a bilingual learner

Key concepts to be learned:

- How they can advocate and encourage their peers to sign up for this class
- Academic language
- Value of bilingualism
- Increased academic success
- Lower graduation rates of the Latinx population

Potential misunderstandings - the audience may not know/understand:

- there is a distinction between Spanish as a World Language class and Spanish for Heritage Learners
- that the benefits of taking this class outweigh the perceived rigor - for students - it may be easier to pass a different elective
- that this class will help them whether or not they plan on going to college

### **Audience Five - Parents of Heritage Language Learners**

Desired result: Parent support for Spanish heritage classes as an elective class in middle school in this suburban school district.

Existing knowledge:

- Their children need instruction in Spanish in order to be readers and writers in Spanish

Key concepts to be learned:

- How they can advocate and encourage their children to sign up for this class
- Academic language
- Value of bilingualism
- Lower graduation rates of the Latinx population

Potential misunderstandings - the audience may not know/understand:

- there is a distinction between Spanish as a World Language class and Spanish for Heritage Learners
- that their children are bilingual socially, however not academically bilingual

### **Preparation of Presentations**

#### **Presentation Skills**

Presentation skills are an art considered everyday by most teachers whether consciously or subconsciously. However, these presentation skills are generally geared towards a K-12 audience. For these five distinct stakeholder presentations, the following audiences will be addressed:



- Board of adults, hailing from different industry backgrounds who share an interest in education and a community mindset.
- Teaching and cultural advocacy professionals
- Managerial professionals
- Parents of different cultural backgrounds who may not be familiar with the United States school district and who may not have completed a high school education
- Heritage language students at the middle school level

With this variety of audiences in mind, the author researched presentation skills for trainers and included references outside of the education field.

Jolles (2017) was a corporate trainer for Xerox and discussed a seven part overview process to build a presentation that he calls UPPOPPR (pronounced YOU-POP-ER).

UPPOPPR is an acronym for the following sections in the presentation overview:

**Utility**

**Product/Goal**

**Process**

**Objective**

**Process Justification**

**Proof of ability**

**Review**

*Utility* is providing a reason why it is important for the audience to listen. Jolles (2017) suggested that adult learning in particular only occurs when they are invested and

have a reason to listen. The audience needs to understand the intrinsic value or consequence to them. *Product*, or setting a goal, is having a clear goal for the seminar/training - in this case, what is the speaker's goal for having the audience listen to the presentation. The goals for each presentation were laid out in the previous section as Wiggin and McTighe's *Desired Results*. The next stage, *process*, advises the audience what and how the speaker is going to deliver their audience to the desired goal. This will be an overview of the key points of the presentation. By providing an outline, the audience understands the scope of the presentation and what the expectation is for them at the end of the presentation. The next stage is to write out *objectives* for the presentation, both for the presenter and the audience. Objectives should be about what the audience needs to know. The fifth step in the UPPOPPR process is *process review* whereby the presenter identifies the source of the information provided. This will be important to this author's project and is largely covered in depth in Chapter Two's literature review. The penultimate stage is *proof of ability*, which is an opportunity to remind the audience of the advantages of listening to the presentation and that what you are asking is achievable. In this author's project, proof of ability may be examples of other school districts who have successfully implemented heritage language classes at the middle school level. The final stage is a *review* of the UPPOPPR elements, even before the speaker enters the main body of the presentation. The review is briefly on the process, objective and utility elements of the presentation. (Jolles 2017)

This author will use the UPPOPPR process when crafting the five presentations and the manuscripts are provided in the Appendices.

## **Cognitive Learning Theories**

Without delving too deeply into learning theories, there is much research pertaining to how our memory processes information and the advantages of including images with text that will be important for this author to consider when designing the five presentations. Mayer (2009) worked in the area of how cognition intersects with technology and a well-known cognitive theorist, Sweller (2017) devised the cognitive load theory.

Mayer (2009) found an 89% improvement in learning when he paired pictures with text instead of text alone. He also advised against extraneous or superfluous elements in a presentation, like animations or additional information. There is a temptation as a presenter to try to impress the audience with visuals, which end up serving as a distraction from the presentation itself. Sweller (2017) researched the working memory and how much new information it could hold before forgetting elements. He also looked at how to move information from the working memory to the long-term memory. He established the  $7 \pm 2$  rule; this rule states that the working memory is only capable of holding 7 (plus or minus 2) pieces of new information at one time when trying to process new information. This needs to be remembered when introducing new concepts to an audience. With this project in mind, the prior knowledge of the board members must be considered as to how much they already know about second language acquisition and being bilingual. The presentation should not require them to hold onto too much new information, so tying it to existing knowledge is key. Sweller (2017) also agreed with Mayer (2009) about the efficacy of pairing texts with images - he insists that the image and text are combined or integrated in some way or that text is close to the image it

pertains to. This prevents the image interfering with understanding by distracting the audience.

Jolles (2017) also touched on the prior experience of an adult audience, by advising that the speaker learns about their audience's experience and background. If there are any common factors in their backgrounds, this may be useful to reference when connecting it to a presentation. In order to have their full attention, adults also like to know the goals of the presentation upfront and if there are any requirements of them. Jolles advised that a good presenter differentiates between the elements that are 'nice to know' from those that are 'need to know'. Repetition of the 'need to know' elements will increase retention and assist the processing in working memory. As some of the audiences presented to for this capstone project will be learning new information, the author will be mindful not to overload the working memory with too much extraneous information and focus on the key elements that will produce the desired results in the audiences' learning.

### **Main body of a Presentation**

In the Schwabish (2016) text, *Better Presentations*, the author recommended the hourglass structure for academic presentations. This structure begins by hooking the audience with a preview of the presenter's conclusions and takeaways. Then the data and methodology are discussed, before finishing with conclusions and discussion. This allows for a lead, a term typically used in news stories to interest the audience, and also leave them with the same conclusions and discussion. There is less chance of losing the audience in the details if they are not attentive enough for the actual main body of the presentation. It also means the most important points are mentioned twice and if for

whatever reason, an audience member or two lose their focus, the key presentation information has been distributed. Research paper abstracts are strong examples of an opening hook; they provide information on why the reader should read the paper and what the main conclusions of the study were. The Schwabish (2016) template ended with a section where the author advises presenters to anticipate potential questions from the audience and prepare appropriate answers in advance.

### **Assessment**

The ultimate assessment of this capstone project's success would be if a Spanish as a Heritage Language class is included as an option in this suburban district's elective options in middle school. In the shorter term, this project will be considered a success if the five presentations lead to a pilot program at one of the middle schools, so that we can experience first-hand *what advantages can be leveraged by offering Spanish for Heritage Learners as an elective to Spanish speaking long-term English language learners in middle school?* After the school board presentation, the author will contact each board member with a questionnaire to gauge their understanding, interest, and opinion of Spanish heritage classes in middle school. The post presentation questionnaire is in Appendix F of this capstone. Similar information gathering will be done for the other four presentations. Follow up actions will be established based on the qualitative feedback from the questionnaires.

### **Timeline Considerations**

The keynote presentation to the Superintendent and School Board is timetabled for the Fall trimester of the academic year 2019/20. The author will request an available time

slot at the monthly Board Meeting or other Board level planning meeting. The other four presentations will be scheduled as appropriate throughout the school year. All five presentations will be written by the end of August 2019, so that all is ready for the next available presentation opportunity.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusion

### Introduction

This capstone project came out of my curiosity of how to support the literacy development in their first language of my Spanish speaking middle school students. My EL students were struggling to understand why their English speaking counterparts could study Spanish as a World Language, but there was not a class for them to learn how to read and write in their first language. I felt a call to action to advocate for that learning opportunity. In the midwest suburban school district where I work, *Spanish for Heritage Learners* is already offered in each high school. In order to introduce a similar class for middle school students, I would have to present a case to the School Board about the *advantages that can be leveraged by offering Spanish for Heritage Learners class as an elective to Spanish speaking long-term English language learners in middle school?* Two main research patterns stood out: Literacy in the first language (in this case, Spanish) leading to academic improvements in the second language (English), and an increased academic self concept. I prepared five presentations representing the stakeholders in the proposed introduction of Spanish for Heritage Learners at the middle school level. The keynote speech in this project is to the Superintendent and school board of my school district. This presentation will be given at a board meeting with a view to the introduction of Heritage Language classes in seventh and eighth grade. The four additional supporting presentations will be to other stakeholders in this area, namely heritage language

speaking middle school students, parents of heritage language students, English as a second language teacher colleagues, and administrators with world language teachers.

In this chapter, I review what I have learned during this capstone project as a learner, researcher, and writer. Additionally I summarize the literature review and highlight particular resources that influenced my project. The limitations and implications of this project are next considered. Finally, I suggest how researchers could continue this work, both in terms of action research and in the use of my presentation series.

### **Researcher, Writer, and Learner Growth**

As a researcher, this capstone project has provided the first opportunity for me to use academic literature in context and be able to apply it to a real-life situation. I found a strong position from which to argue my case for a Spanish for Heritage Learners class in middle school and have already approached my Superintendent to set up a meeting for this capstone presentation. I was challenged as a writer while writing the five presentations, because although they had commonalities from the research, they each had different audiences and different desired results. The Understanding by Design template (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p.262) helped me organize the content for each presentation and the UPPOPPR method (Jolles 2017, pp.117-135) assisted with the structure of each one. Some of the content overlapped, but there are distinct focuses for each presentation that differ from the others. I learned that using a system like the Wiggins and McTighe (2005) backwards design was vital to differentiating the five presentations. This has developed my awareness of how to use a system to differentiate instruction and



assessment in the classroom, and therefore improve the outcome. I will continue to use this system in my teaching practice to create unit plans or develop classroom action research.

Another area of growth in my teaching practice is my confidence to consider classroom based action research. Action research is research carried out by teachers on their own teaching practices in their classrooms (Reeves 2008). I always considered research to be very academic and carried out in the guise of further education. Having completed this capstone and after receiving some encouraging interest at the district level to consider my suggestions, I feel confident that I could carry out action research in my classroom to share with colleagues at a professional learning committee (PLC) level. I have learned that as long as I follow ethical practices, I can initiate my own research projects and find a method of sharing the results with colleagues. In his book, *Reframing teacher leadership to improve your school* (2008), Reeves suggested that the credibility of action research by colleagues has a great influence on teacher professional development. He suggests a hypothetical conversation from an action researcher to her colleague: “This isn’t some theoretical abstraction- this is me. I really did it with my students right here. It may not be perfect, but I know that it can work, so why not give it a try!” (p.36). After having completed this capstone, I can confidently see myself having a similar conversation with a colleague.

I believe that one area of growth as a teacher will be to include the consideration of academic self concept during lesson planning. Improved academic self concept leads to increased motivation in the classroom. I am more aware that I have to build up my

students' confidence in order to help them achieve academically. I will introduce this into my teaching practices by building opportunities for success for all students which will improve their academic self concept. This will require me to differentiate assessments, so that students are set up for success and see their progress and potential as a learner through successful assessments. According to my research for this capstone, being successful will increase their self concept and I should expect to see a growth in confidence by students attempting more difficult tasks.

Finally, I have learned that in order to implement change, there is a need for someone to step up and start a conversation that will lead to change. In my district PLC, we have often talked of how *Spanish for Heritage Learners* classes could be the missing piece for the success of our long-term ELLs. By reviewing the research in this area and synthesizing that information, I have created resources that I will use in my district and could be used by any teacher in their district. These resources can be used to kick-start a campaign to introduce a new class into middle school. Even by raising this issue with the Superintendent in my District, I have already found an opportunity to share the research and spur on a pilot program for *Spanish for Heritage Learners* in one of our middle schools.

### **Literature Review**

Chapter two's literature review attempted to answer the research question of *what advantages can be leveraged by offering Spanish for Heritage Learners class as an elective to Spanish speaking long-term English language learners in middle school?* This

chapter began by defining the term heritage language learners and considered the size of this population. Carreira and Kagan (2017) indicated that there is over one fifth of school-aged children raised speaking at least one other language than English at home. Peregoy and Boyle (2000) were among researchers who identified that the needs of this group of learners are often missing in the debate about the achievement gap. Heritage language speakers have very strong oral skills in their first language, however are not literate in that language. These students' skills in English as a second language are strong in a social context, but not in academic language. As our Spanish heritage language speakers are not being educated in their home language, they do not develop those academic language skills in Spanish. They have to develop academic language skills in both languages, but they are only taught those skills in English and not in Spanish. Carreira and Kagan (2017) also recommended that language classes should be provided in the home language to some extent throughout a child's K-12 education. Analyzing heritage language learners further, Freeman (2002) advised that students with limited English proficiency (designated in schools as English Language Learners) made up a third of that group. Within that group, 75% are Spanish speakers. Students that have been in EL service for over five years are considered to be long-term English language learners. The significance of the *Every Student Succeeds Act*, has begun a close analysis of English Learner proficiency growth (measured by ACCESS for WIDA testing). This has increased the focus of national and state education stakeholders towards English language learners. From the onset of their education, these learners have been learning the meaning of English words as well as how to read them. A longitudinal study by

Mancilla-Martinez and Lesaux (2010) concluded that by fifth grade Spanish speakers could read words correctly, but did not understand the words - falling about two to three grades lower than English speakers. This gap keeps growing, because in order to catch up, they would have to progress more in one year than their peers, while at the same time, the language is increasing in complexity. Chapter two reviewed studies and meta-analyses into the benefits of bilingual education. The research was clear; by learning to read and write in Spanish, not only was the first language literacy of students improved, but also second language literacy, i.e. English proficiency was also improved (Goldenbert and Coleman, 2010). Thomas and Collier's 2002 longitudinal study confidently concluded that the strongest predictor of high achievement in second language learning came from those who have received more first language grade-level schooling.

In addition, when heritage language speaking students analyzed through a cultural identity lens, we recognize the link between language and identity. Leeman (2015) studied how these two factors are connected. When language has a negative connotation attached to it by the dominant society, this negatively affects the pride in speaking that language. In addition, Leeman (2015) looked at how the perception of how *Mexican* a person is considered to be by other people sometimes depended on the level of proficiency demonstrated in that language. Therefore, lacking in Spanish language skills could reduce a claim to Mexican heritage in some eyes. Leeman (2015) wrote that positive feelings about one's first language led to academic success. Pajares (2003) worked on self concept and surmised that students' perceptions about themselves are very

influential on academic success or failure. Students with lower self concepts avoided difficult tasks and those with higher self concepts took a chance and tried that more challenging work.

Chapter two ended with research around heritage language classes. Leeman (2015) found that those classes were typically centered around identity and used texts and history to support that common theme. Kagan and Dillon (2001) suggested that heritage language classes should focus on the areas of language weakness in heritage Spanish speakers, i.e. academic language, discourse and cohesion of ideas in both written and spoken formats. Jimenez (2003) wrote about bilingualism being a resource and not a handicap. Heritage classes for Spanish speakers would help build that positivity when we describe students as developing bilinguals, rather than limited English proficient.

### **Limitations**

One main limitation stood out to me while researching this project. There is a dearth of research into heritage language and its influence on second language acquisition in the middle grades. There is a large body of research at the elementary level. However, I was able to find some secondary level research, which helped to build my case. A secondary limitation concerns consistency. Heritage language classes come in so many different formats in regard to student age, student language proficiency, and ratio of heritage language instruction to second language instruction. This makes it difficult to form comparisons. The meta-analyses discussed in chapter two were a big help in this regard (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010; Thomas & Collier, 2002). They had already created filters and statistical measures by which they could compare studies. These professional

researchers have analysis skills that are beyond my own capability, so I felt I could present their data with confidence.

### **Implications**

This project developed into a strong advocacy project for policy change at a school-district level. My hope is that following the presentation to my district school board, a pilot program will be initiated at one of the middle schools. If this does occur, then a responsibility will arise to follow these learners and collect a variety of data for research purposes. A measurement should be devised to ascertain if first language learning does indeed improve second language acquisition at the middle school level. Following a successful pilot project, I anticipate that this would become a district-wide elective program for seventh and eighth grade learners which could potentially expand to a mainstreamed class statewide.

The research question posed in this capstone of *what advantages can be leveraged by offering Spanish for Heritage Learners to Spanish speaking long-term English language learners in middle school* had a specific focus on long-term English language learners; however, the research discussed was not always specific to long-term English language learners for two reasons. The first being that there is not one standard definition of long-term English language learners. It is a very difficult term to quantify due to the number of variables to consider. The second reason was that the research did not separate long-term English language learners from heritage language learners, or indeed any kind of English language learner from heritage language learners. Not all heritage language learners are classed as English language learners. Both of these factors caused me to

widen my capstone project to be applicable to all heritage language learners, as it became clearer that this learning opportunity had implications for a wider group of learners than for English Language Learners alone.

There is an incongruity between our economy needing a bilingual workforce and setting up an education system that succeeds in producing fully bilingual students. Jimenez (2003) noted that dual language programs at the elementary level are backed by research, but not available or supported politically by funding. The implications of the success of this project are reliant on astute research and communication of the *advantages leveraged by offering Spanish for Heritage Learners to Spanish speaking long-term English language learners in middle school.*

### **Future Research Opportunities**

There are many research opportunities that could arise out of a heritage language pilot program in middle school. A longitudinal study should be started that follows these learners through the next six years of heritage language learning. During that time, measurements should be taken of grades across a variety of their classes, test results, namely state language proficiency tests like ACCESS for WIDA and standardized testing in English and Math. A control group should also be established of students who do not choose to take the Heritage Language for Spanish speakers class. In that way we can make direct comparisons across data points. A further idea would be to use a control group who only took this class in high school and compare their results against those who started their Spanish literacy journey in middle school. With regards to measuring other

advantages, in particular those of increasing academic self concept and motivation, a system of qualitative research would need to be established.

There is also an opportunity here to refer back to my research question of *what advantages can be leveraged by offering Spanish for Heritage Learners to Spanish speaking long-term English language learners in middle school*. A research project could focus on this group either in isolation or in comparison to other student groups. The definition of *long-term English language learners* would need to be strictly identified for the research project, because, as I detailed in the *Implications* section above, this is not an easily identifiable group. The definition would need to include the following parameters: length of time students are identified as EL students, WIDA ACCESS score and progress towards proficiency over a set time period, and consideration of whether to include students who were educated in the USA since kindergarten or if students will be included that were schooled outside of the USA in their initial years of school.

### **Project Presentation**

The series of five stakeholder presentations around this capstone's research are available in the appendices of this document and can be taken and adapted to meet the specific needs of any school district. The keynote presentation is to the School Board. Two presentations support that one; one is directed to a principal and world language teacher audience and the next for EL teacher colleagues. These two presentations also advocate for the introduction of a pilot program of a Spanish for Heritage Learners class in middle school. The final two are directed to the learners themselves and their parents. A new class represents uncharted territory and it may be intimidating to those that it is



designed for. By having speeches ready that anticipate participant concerns, will ease the implementation of a pilot program. I have also translated the parent presentation in Spanish, because that would be a more appropriate language in which to present to that audience.

### **Conclusion**

A wonderful resource pool of emerging bilinguals is already here in our schools, under our noses. Instead of supporting their bilingualism, the current school system suppresses it, by focusing on academic success in English alone. Indeed, the heritage language seems to be considered a deficit that is stalling these bilinguals in their English language proficiency. While answering the capstone question of *what advantages can be leveraged by offering a Spanish for Heritage Learners class as an elective to Spanish speaking long-term English language learners in middle school*, I have repeatedly found research that strongly states that teaching students in their primary language increases their achievement in English as their second language and that the cultural identity of a student is strengthened by learning in their first language, which can then lead to an increase in motivation and academic confidence. This would seem to demand radical changes in our education system; instead of waiting for that big shift, school districts can make small changes that will potentially make a big difference for their students. It is my hope that by advocating for Heritage Language classes in my school district, a learning opportunity will be created that will develop the skills of our bilingual learners in both academic achievement and academic self concept.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### School Board presentation

**Link to Accompanying Google Slides:**

**[https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/10za2MnXmmfHEJIL69jFpdJZetrQ3TbOYjDbvQ8yan\\_Q/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/10za2MnXmmfHEJIL69jFpdJZetrQ3TbOYjDbvQ8yan_Q/edit?usp=sharing)**

It goes against my nature as an English as a Second Language teacher and an advocate of bilingual learners to refuse a child the opportunity to further their education in language; however, I find myself doing just that each January when the seventh and eighth grade students choose the next year's elective classes. **SLIDE 2** The students tell me they are going to sign up for Spanish next year. I try to explain that Spanish isn't the right class for them because they already speak Spanish. To which they reply, "but I don't speak it well and I don't know how to read or write in Spanish". My reply is always disappointing to them, because I try to explain the difference between Spanish for beginners and the type of instruction they need. I suggest they wait until high school and then sign up for Spanish for Heritage Learners. Heritage learners are those who were brought up speaking a different language at home.

The students are disappointed and confused that they cannot take a Spanish class as an elective in seventh and eighth grade. They do not feel competent in their first language, because they learned it as an oral language and are not literate in that language. However, Spanish as a world language class offered at middle schools is not an appropriate class

for them, because they don't need to know how to introduce their family or learn the names for food or pets. A class they would benefit from though is one designed to build on the oral skills they do have and develop their reading and writing skills.

I am here to speak to you today to ask you to consider the introduction of a Spanish for Heritage Learners class as an elective for middle schoolers in District 500 across all six middle schools. **SLIDE 3** There is research from the 1980s through to this decade that confidently states that teaching students in their primary language increases their achievement in English as their second language and that the cultural identity of a student is strengthened by learning in their first language, which can then lead to an increase in motivation and academic confidence.

Working with the motto of *[Insert your district motto here]*, ISD 500 is the fourth largest school district in our state and has been recognized for its pioneering work in STEM, magnet schools and 1:1 technology instruction. Another growth area that we should lead in is being a multilingual and multicultural educational institution, producing bilingual or multilingual students ready for college and careers in today's global economy. We have an amazing pool of emerging bilingual students in this district, whom we should focus in on as a specific learning group. However this group is failing academically, not only in our own district, but across the nation. We have a large achievement gap at the high school graduation level for our Spanish speaking students. **SLIDE 4** The overall graduation rate last year was XX%. When that number is broken down by race, we see the Latino students only graduating at a XX% rate, compared to White students at 92.7% and African American students at XX%. That is a difference of

XX% between our White students and our Latino students. This learning group in particular is not performing in line with other students, and in regard to graduation rates which are behind both African-American and White students. Today, I will present information about this significant group of learners and their needs and a dynamic solution that will increase their bilingual literacy (in both English and Spanish) and in turn reduce the achievement gap deficit.

At the end of this presentation, you will have a stronger understanding of heritage language learners, in particular Spanish speakers and will be able to consider their unique needs. The research and information for this presentation are a result of the completed capstone project for my Hamline University Master of Arts in Teaching. I have also prepared a series of four additional presentations on this subject for principals, teachers, parents and students, which may be used or adapted by this organization. The knowledge I share with you today may assist you further in discussing solutions for District 500 bilingual learners with other board members in other districts. Spanish literacy classes are already offered in some Minneapolis and St Paul middle schools, as well as some smaller school districts in Minnesota.

I would first like to speak to you about this important group of bilingual students and review the advantages of introducing Spanish for Heritage Learners to the middle school level. I hope that you will share my conviction that by improving dual language literacy earlier in a student's career, this will improve the academic success of this vital demographic group.

Over 22%, or more than one fifth of the country's school-aged student population in 2017, were raised speaking at least one other language than English at home (Carreira & Kagan 2018). **SLIDE 5** These students are sometimes referred to as heritage language speakers - they are to some degree bilingual in their heritage language and English, with many only speaking or understanding their parents' language. This group of emerging bilinguals have strong oral skills; however, they are illiterate in their first language, also called heritage language, because they cannot read or write in that language. In this district, our Spanish speaking students are below grade level in regard to English literacy. For example, of the incoming 6th graders to Orchard Tree Middle School this year, all the English language learners are below the XXth percentile on the MCA reading test. I would like to highlight that heritage language learners include EL students, but is a much wider group than that. Heritage language learners include all second language speakers whether they are designated limited English proficiency or not.

We refer to academic language as the language of school. All school-children are academic language learners. This language uses very specific vocabulary and constructs that we would not necessarily use in our social language. Cummins, who is a key theorist in second language acquisition, first distinguished between social language and academic language. Social language is used for day to day conversational and social interactions. He contrasted this with academic language, which is often more abstract and is necessary to discuss academic content in the classroom context. **SLIDE 6** For example, looking at this slide, notice the difference between “*What did you get on that math test?*” and “*Even though crocodiles have the same appearance, they live in different habitats*”. Often,

heritage language learners are considered proficient in English long before they actually are, because they have strong social language skills. This also applies to their heritage language: for example, Spanish. As our Spanish heritage language speakers are not being educated in their home language, they do not develop those academic language skills in Spanish. They have to develop academic language skills in both languages, but they are only taught those skills in English and not in Spanish. There is a great depth of research wherein researchers agree that language classes should be provided in the home language to some extent throughout the K-12 education of the child, with some even calling for heritage language education to be mainstreamed in the future.

The ultimate goal of first language learning is bilingual literacy, having the ability to read and write in two languages. It would be unusual to find a fully bilingual student at the grade school level whose language skills in both languages are equivalent. More typically, we have emergent bilinguals who have yet to become literate in both languages, or unbalanced bilinguals who have different levels of skills between both languages - for example, they may read in English, but not in Spanish.

There are elements of learning a language that transfer from one's first language to a second language. Not all the learning starts from a clean slate. **SLIDE 7** Looking at this dual iceberg image created by Cummins, we view a bilingual speaker's two languages represented as distinct "icebergs" or triangles rising above a dotted horizontal line that represents the surface features of a language. The surface features of a language are the visible linguistic skills of a bilingual speaker (the actual words we use). Underneath the surface features line is a large triangular shaped area where the two languages overlap.

This represents the common underlying proficiency of a bilingual speaker, which is all of his or her skills used to understand or create language. For example, the concept of there being a past tense, how to decode text, or how to use strategies when answering reading comprehension questions. These skills are transferable across language learning, so learning the skill in one language creates a schema to apply to a second language - the actual skill only needs to be learned one time in order for the brain to be able to apply that skill into other languages. Research has shown that if a student has not developed an academic language register in their first language, it takes them longer to develop that academic language in English.

I have reviewed a large body of research papers that all conclude that teaching in a student's primary language promotes his or her achievement in English as a second language. This research has a bias toward elementary aged students; however, does include studies with secondary students and reaches the same conclusion. In particular, one longitudinal study at the secondary level by Thomas and Collier found that dual language programs in varying formats and percentages of instruction in a student's first language were the only programs with outcomes of students reaching the 50th percentile in both their first language and English across all subjects. Imagine if we could move some of our bilingual students towards that level of success. The research authors confidently concluded that the strongest predictor of high achievement in a second language (English) comes from those who have received more first language grade-level schooling.

It should be noted that researchers have commented on a lack of studies into bilingual literacy at the secondary education level. In addition they question if academic achievement is increased across other content areas like Mathematics and Science. However, there is enough existing research to assertively claim increased academic achievement in English and the heritage language.

Moving on to the cultural identity of heritage language learners, research finds that language and identity are closely intertwined. Cultural identity is in simple terms a sense of belonging based on one's ancestry and cultural values. Having low skills in their first language can affect the core of a student's identity. Most of our Latino and Latina students identify as being Mexican or Mexican American (if that is the country of their heritage). The majority of these second and third generation students are not fluent in Spanish - often speaking a form of Spanglish (a mix of Spanish and English words). This lack of fluency can be seen to weaken their personal claim to Mexican heritage, because they have a lower level of Spanish proficiency. With their Mexican heritage being a source of great pride for them, this can adversely affect the identity of these adolescents, who are developmentally working on understanding who they are. In today's political climate, speaking Spanish in an English dominant society can also be viewed negatively, because the Spanish language is at times connected with undocumented immigration. Wouldn't it be amazing if we could empower these students to master their language skills in Spanish by being fully literate, so they are informed and proud of their heritage?

Research on students' perceptions about themselves showed that students with low self concepts avoided doing what they perceived to be difficult tasks and those with high

self concepts took a chance and challenged themselves. Motivation is a subject that often arises in our middle school ESL teacher Professional Learning Committee. As a group we notice that this matter of self concept is one that we believe to be extremely relevant when it comes to motivation. Spanish heritage language students tend to come from low socio-economic backgrounds and do not have role models who completed a high school education or went on to college. Oftentimes, those that did finish a college education have moved out of their neighborhoods, so school-age students don't get to see the lifestyle change that an education can bring. Consequently, the attitude of not trying because it doesn't matter anyway is incredibly difficult to overcome. If we empower these students with literacy in their own language, which will then feed into improved academic achievement in English and potentially other areas, we may be able to break this cycle and positively affect the achievement gap. That is why we have pushed so hard to have the Spanish for Heritage Learners class at all high schools in our district. I would like you to seriously consider how we can offer that opportunity at an earlier age and in particular in the middle grades.

In District 500's high schools, the *Spanish for Heritage Learners* is taught 100% in Spanish and works on the development of students' linguistic skills - enhancing those oral language skills they already have and increasing their literacy using texts through the lens of cultural practices and Central/South American history. Research has shown that students have a higher level of comprehension when the texts feature an area or issue in which they have background knowledge. The introduction of culturally relevant pedagogy into all teacher education is representative of this core understanding. **SLIDE 8**



This quote in a Spotlight article that featured some of our students sums up the goal of these classes beautifully:

*“XXX and XXX from XXX High School said, “For us, being in this class means that we can discover more about our Hispanic culture, and our identity as hispanics in our community and we know that our voice should be taken into account. We can be great global citizens.”*

There is an incongruity between our economy needing a bilingual workforce and actually establishing an education system that succeeds in developing bilingual speakers and writers. I really hope that District 500 can continue its leadership in this vital area of education and extend our resources into the middle school arena, starting with a pilot project at one of the middle schools.

I have provided a link to my script, and this presentation has been forwarded to each of you. I would like to contact you each personally after this presentation with a questionnaire to collect your thoughts and to ask if I can provide any additional information you may need.

I do hope that this presentation has been informative and of use to all of you. I would also like to invite you to contact myself or Helen Brown (our Secondary ESL lead teacher) to arrange a visit to one of our high school’s Spanish for Heritage Learners classes. You will experience the vitality of our emerging bilingual students and understand our enthusiasm about introducing this opportunity at a younger age in middle school. **SLIDE 9**

(District number and school names are pseudonyms).

## Appendix B

### Presentation to ESL Teacher Colleagues and Cultural Family Advocates

**Link to Accompanying Google Slides:**

**<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1j3T4PZgIJNIgPDwiKw6rOrkAtVXrXgHg1cqI4s8rvh4/edit?usp=sharing>**

In our middle school Professional Learning Committee meetings (PLCs), we have often discussed and lamented over the lack of progress made in English proficiency and general academic engagement of our long-term EL students. One solution came up time and time again of being able to offer our students a Spanish language class, tailored specifically to their needs. We were all thrilled to hear that Spanish for Heritage Learners is now being offered at all four high schools - wouldn't it be great to extend that opportunity to our middle schoolers? **SLIDE 2** My capstone project came out of these conversations and I researched the advantages of offering a *Spanish for Heritage Learners* class in middle school, with a view to using this research as a platform from which to launch a campaign to introduce such a class to our district. The keynote speech, in a series of five presentations, is to the School Board and I will present to them at an upcoming School Board Meeting. I am sharing this with you today, so that you can also join in, and as a PLC, we can advocate for this group of learners. After listening today, you will be able to use the resources I created for my capstone project and lobby your building principals and world language departments. We will be focusing on two key learning elements, bilingual literacy and cultural identity and how we can increase our

students' academic success by offering a *Spanish for Heritage Learners* class in middle school.

ISD 500 is the fourth largest school district in our state and has been recognized for its pioneering work in STEM, magnet schools and 1:1 technology instruction. Another growth area that we should lead in is being a multilingual and multicultural educational institution, producing bilingual or multilingual students ready for college and careers in today's global economy. **SLIDE 3** We have an amazing pool of emerging bilingual students whom we should focus in on as a specific learning group. However this group is failing academically, not only in our own district, but across the nation. We have a large achievement gap in our school district at the high school graduation level for our Spanish speaking students. **SLIDE 4** This learning group in particular are not performing in line with other students, and in terms of graduation rates are behind both African-American and Caucasian students.

Over 22% or more than one fifth of the country's school-aged student population in 2017 were raised speaking at least one other language than English at home (Carreira & Kagan 2018). These students are sometimes referred to as heritage language speakers - they are to some degree bilingual in the heritage language and English, with many only speaking or understanding their parents' language. This group of emerging bilinguals have strong oral skills, however are illiterate in their first language, also called heritage language, meaning they cannot read or write in that language. In this district, our Spanish speaking students are below grade level in terms of English literacy. For example, of the incoming Spanish speaking 6th graders to Orchard Tree Middle School this year, all the

English language learners are below the XXth %ile on the MCA reading test. I would like to highlight that heritage language learners include EL students, but is a much wider group than that. It includes all second language speakers whether they are designated limited English proficiency or not.

Academic language, as we all know, is the language of school. All school-children are academic language learners. **SLIDE 5** This language uses very specific vocabulary and constructs that we would not necessarily use in our social language. Social language is used for day to day conversational and social interactions. This contrasts with academic language, which is often more abstract and is necessary to discuss academic content in the classroom context. Often, heritage language learners are perceived as proficient in English long before they actually are, because they have strong social language skills. This also applies to their heritage language, for example Spanish. As our Spanish heritage language speakers are not being educated in their home language, they do not develop those academic language skills in Spanish. They have to develop academic language skills in both languages, but they are only taught those skills in English and not in Spanish. Researchers overwhelmingly agree that language classes should be provided in the home language to some extent throughout the K-12 education of the child, with some even calling for heritage language education to be mainstreamed in the future.

The ultimate goal of first language learning is bilingual literacy, having the ability to read and write in two languages. It would be unusual to find a fully bilingual student at the grade school level whose language skills in both languages are the same. More typically, we have emergent bilinguals who have yet to become literate in both

languages, or unbalanced bilinguals who have different levels of skills between both languages - for example, they may read in English, but not in Spanish.

**SLIDE 6** I have reviewed a large body of research papers that all conclude that teaching in a student's primary language promotes their achievement in English as a second language. This research has a bias towards elementary aged students, however does include studies with secondary students and reaches the same conclusion. In particular, one longitudinal study at the secondary level by Thomas and Collier found that dual language programs in varying formats and percentages of instruction in a student's first language were the only programs with outcomes of students reaching the 50th percentile in both their first language and English across all subjects. Imagine if we could move some of our bilingual students towards that level of success. The research authors confidently concluded that the strongest predictor of high achievement in a second language (English) comes from those who have received more first language grade-level schooling.

There are elements of learning a language that transfer from one's first language to a second language. **SLIDE 7** As a reminder, here is Cummins' Common Underlying Proficiency Theory. Not all the learning starts from a clean slate. Looking at this dual iceberg image created by Cummins, we view a bilingual speaker's two languages represented as distinct "icebergs" or triangles rising above a dotted horizontal line that represents the surface features of a language. The surface features of a language are the visible linguistic skills of a bilingual speaker (the actual words we use). Underneath the surface features line is a large triangular shaped area where the two languages overlap.

This represents the common underlying proficiency of a bilingual speaker, which is all of his or her skills used to understand or create language. For example, the concept of there being a past tense, how to decode text, or how to use strategies when answering reading comprehension questions. These skills are transferable across language learning, so once you have learned it in one language, you have created a schema to apply to a second language - you do not need to learn that skill again. Research has shown that if a student has not developed an academic language register in their first language, it takes them longer to develop that academic language in English.

It should be noted that researchers have commented on a lack of studies into bilingual literacy at the secondary education level. In addition they question if academic achievement is increased across other content areas like Mathematics and Science. However, there is enough existing research to confidently claim increased academic achievement in English and the heritage language.

Moving on to the cultural identity of heritage language learners, research finds that language and identity are closely intertwined. This is an area we often discuss at our PLCs, as we ponder why motivation is so low for our long-term ELLs. We talk about the students being stuck between two languages and knowing they are not proficient in either one. This ties into cultural identity which in simple terms is a sense of belonging based on one's ancestry and cultural values. **SLIDE 8** Having low skills in their first language can affect the core of a student's identity. Most of our Latinx students identify as being Mexican (if that is the country of their heritage) or Mexican American. The majority of these second and third generation students are not fluent in Spanish - often speaking a

form of Spanglish (a mix of Spanish and English words). This lack of fluency can be seen to weaken their personal claim to Mexican heritage, because they have a lower level of Spanish proficiency. With their Mexican heritage being a source of great pride for them, this can negatively affect the identity of these adolescents, who are developmentally working on understanding who they are. In today's current political climate, speaking Spanish in an English dominant society can also be viewed negatively, and the Spanish language is at times connected with undocumented immigration. Wouldn't it be amazing if we could empower these students to master their language skills in Spanish by being fully literate, so they are informed and proud of their heritage?

Motivation is a subject that often arises in our middle school ESL teacher Professional Learning Committee. As a group we notice that this matter of self concept is one that we believe to be extremely relevant when it comes to motivation. Indeed, research on students' perceptions about themselves showed that students with low self concepts avoided doing what they perceived to be difficult tasks and those with high self concepts took a chance and challenged themselves. In addition, Spanish heritage language students tend to come from low socio-economic backgrounds and do not have role models who went on to college, or who even completed a high school education. Those that did finish a college education have moved out of their neighborhoods, so school-age students don't get to see the lifestyle change that an education can bring. Consequently, the attitude of not trying because it doesn't matter anyway is incredibly difficult to overcome. If we empower these students with literacy in their own language, which will then feed into improved academic achievement in English and potentially other areas, we may be able

to break this cycle and positively affect the achievement gap. That is why the EL department pushed so hard to have the Spanish for Heritage Learners class at all high schools in the district.

In District 500's high schools, the Spanish for Heritage Learners is taught 100% in Spanish and works on the development of students' linguistic skills - enhancing those oral language skills they already have and increasing their literacy using texts through the lens of cultural practices and Latinx history. Research has shown that students have a higher level of comprehension when the texts feature an area or issue in which they have background knowledge. **SLIDE 9** This quote in a Spotlight article that featured some of our students sums up the goal of these classes beautifully:

*“XXX and XXX from XXX High School said, “For us, being in this class means that we can discover more about our hispanic culture, and our identity as hispanics in our community and we know that our voice should be taken into account. We can be great global citizens.”*

There is an incongruity between our economy needing a bilingual workforce and actually establishing an education system that succeeds in developing bilingual speakers and writers. I hope that you share my call to action and will advocate with me by sharing this information with principals and world language departments at your buildings. It would be great to have District 500 continuing its leadership in this vital area of education and extending its resources into the middle school arena. By presenting to the School Board and then following that with the same information and ideas to the principals, we can raise awareness and enough curiosity to have a pilot plan introduced at



one of the middle schools. This would provide us with a unique circumstance of being able to collect data on a specific program in order to have the program extended into all middle schools.

If we are successful, there are many research opportunities that would arise out of a pilot program in middle school, which would need a group of motivated researchers to coordinate the collation and analysis of information. A longitudinal study should be started that follows these learners through the next six years of heritage language learning. During that time, measurements should be taken of grades across a variety of their classes, test results, namely state language proficiency tests like ACCESS for WIDA and standardized testing in English and Math. A control group should also be established of students who do not choose to take the Heritage language for Spanish speakers class. In that way we can make direct comparisons across data points. A further idea would be to use a control group who only took this class in high school and compare their results against those who started their Spanish literacy journey in middle school. With regards to measuring other advantages, in particular those of increasing academic self concept and motivation, a system of qualitative research would need to be established. So, for those of you who are looking for research ideas for your Master's or Doctorate's degree, or know anyone who is, there is potentially a widespread amount of data to collect and analyze.

Thank you so much for your time and attention today. I know that you share my excitement about this opportunity for middle school Spanish speakers. Imagine the pride on their faces as they begin to read and write in their own language and learn about Latinx world leaders, thinkers and influencers. Their academic achievements could grow

and increase the percentage of graduating Spanish speakers from high school. Then imagine our pride as they pass the bilingual seals of distinction in Spanish, after having had the opportunity to study the language for five years, and go onto college or careers where their bilingual skills are highly lauded. The opportunity for middle school EL students to partake in a Spanish for Heritage Learners class could turn their world around.

### **SLIDE 10**

(District number and school names are pseudonyms).

## Appendix C

### Administration and world language teachers presentation

#### Link to Accompanying Google Slides:

[https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1jlNUXVr\\_zZh4J5vDNfHibLgMA3vGZq0E5z6HIsW0sbo/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1jlNUXVr_zZh4J5vDNfHibLgMA3vGZq0E5z6HIsW0sbo/edit?usp=sharing)

As you know, we repeat the same message every January during electives sign-up - *Spanish speakers may not sign up for Spanish*. We try to explain to our bilingual students that world language Spanish isn't the right class for them because they already speak Spanish. **SLIDE 2** To which they reply, "but I don't speak it well and I don't know how to read or write in Spanish". My response is always disappointing to them, because I try to explain the difference between Spanish for beginners and the type of instruction they need. I suggest they wait until high school and then sign up for Spanish for Heritage Learners (heritage learners being those who were brought up speaking a different language at home). It does not sit well with me as an ESL teacher and an advocate of bilingual learners to refuse a child the opportunity to further their education in language. The students are disappointed and confused that they cannot take a Spanish class as an elective in seventh and eighth grade. They do not feel competent in their first language, because they learned it as an oral language and are not literate in that language. However, Spanish as a world language class offered at middle schools is not an appropriate class for them, because they don't need to know how to introduce their family or learn the

names for food or pets. A class they would benefit from however, is one designed to build on the oral skills they do have and develop their reading and writing skills.

It is very exciting to know that Spanish for Heritage Learners is now being offered at all four high schools for our Spanish speaking students. That class introduces academic discourse to their existing oral skills and introduces reading and writing skills through a culturally relevant curriculum. I would really like to provide that opportunity to our middle schoolers. Consequently, my capstone project for my Master's in Teaching led me to research the advantages of offering a *Spanish for Heritage Learners* class in middle school, with a view to using this research as a platform from which to launch a campaign to introduce such a class to our district. I have written five presentations to the stakeholders involved with this potential new class. The keynote speech is to the School Board and I will present to them at an upcoming School Board Meeting. I am sharing this with you today to ask for your consideration or support of a pilot Spanish for Heritage Learners class at Orchard Tree Middle School.

There are two major research findings that underpin the argument for introducing this class. **SLIDE 3** There is research from the 1980s through to this decade that confidently states that teaching students in their primary language increases their achievement in English as their second language and that the cultural identity of a student is strengthened by learning in their first language, which can then lead to an increase in motivation or academic confidence. Working under the mantra of *One District, Infinite Possibilities*, this district should lead in being a multilingual and multicultural educational institution, producing bilingual or multilingual students ready for college and careers in today's

global economy. We have an amazing pool of emerging bilingual students right here whom we should focus in on as a specific learning group. However this group is failing academically, not only in our district, but across the nation. We have a large achievement gap at the high school graduation level for our Spanish speaking students. **SLIDE 4** The overall graduation rate last year was XX%. When that number is broken down by race, we see the Latino students only graduating at an XX% rate, compared to White students at 92.7% and African American students at XX%. That is a difference of XX% between our White students and our Latino students. This learning group in particular is not performing in line with other students, as evidenced by the district's graduation rates which are behind both African-American and White students.

Over 22%, or more than one fifth of the country's school-aged student population in 2017, were raised speaking at least one other language than English at home (Carriera & Kagan, 2018). These students are sometimes referred to as heritage language speakers - they are to some degree bilingual in the heritage language and English, with many only speaking or understanding their parents' language. **SLIDE 5** This group of emerging bilinguals have strong oral skills; however, they are illiterate in their first language, because they cannot read or write in that language. In this district, our Spanish speaking students are below grade level in regard to English literacy. For example, of the incoming 6th graders to Orchard Tree Middle School this year, all the English language learners are below the XXth percentile on the MCA reading test. I would like to highlight that heritage language learners include EL students, but is a much wider group than that. It

includes all second language speakers whether they are designated limited English proficient or not.

We refer to academic language as the language of school. All school-children are academic language learners. This language uses very specific vocabulary and constructs that we would not necessarily use in our social language. Cummins who is a key theorist in second language acquisition first distinguished between social language and academic language. Social language is used for day to day conversational and social interactions. He contrasted this with academic language, which is often more abstract and is necessary to discuss academic content in the classroom context. **SLIDE 6** For example, looking at this slide, notice the difference between “*What did you get on that math test?*” and “*Even though crocodiles have the same appearance, they live in different habitats*”. Often, heritage language learners are considered proficient in English long before they actually are, because they have strong social language skills. This also applies to their heritage language: for example, Spanish. As our Spanish heritage language speakers are not being educated in their home language, they do not develop those academic language skills in Spanish. They have to develop academic language skills in both languages, but they are only taught those skills in English and not in Spanish. There is a great depth of research wherein researchers agree that language classes should be provided in the home language to some extent throughout the K-12 education of the child, with some even calling for heritage language education to be mainstreamed in the future.

The ultimate goal of first language learning is bilingual literacy, having the ability to read and write in two languages. It would be unusual to find a fully bilingual student at

the grade school level whose language skills in both languages are the same. More typically, we have emergent bilinguals who have yet to become literate in both languages, or unbalanced bilinguals who have different levels of skills between both languages - for example, they may read in English, but not in Spanish.

There are elements of learning a language that transfer from one's first language to a second language. Not all the learning starts from a clean slate. Cummins also presented a theory about the common underlying proficiency of a bilingual speaker, which is all of his or her skills used to understand or create language. For example, the concept of there being a past tense, how to decode text, or how to use strategies when answering reading comprehension questions. These skills are transferable across language learning, so learning the skill in one language creates a schema to apply to a second language - the actual skill only needs to be learned one time in order for the brain to be able to apply that skill into other languages. Research has shown that if a student has not developed an academic language register in their first language, it takes them longer to develop that academic language in English.

I have reviewed a large body of research papers that all conclude that teaching in a student's primary language promotes his or her achievement in English as a second language. This research has a bias toward elementary aged students; however, does include studies with secondary students and reaches the same conclusion. In particular, one longitudinal study at the secondary level by Thomas and Collier found that dual language programs in varying formats and percentages of instruction in a student's first language were the only programs with outcomes of students reaching the 50th percentile

in both their first language and English across all subjects. Imagine if we could move some of our bilingual students towards that level of success. The research authors confidently concluded that the strongest predictor of high achievement in a second language (English) comes from those who have received more first language grade-level schooling.

Moving on to the cultural identity of heritage language learners, research finds that language and identity are closely intertwined. Cultural identity is in simple terms a sense of belonging based on one's ancestry and cultural values. Having low skills in their first language can affect the core of a student's identity. Most of our Latino and Latina students identify as being Mexican or Mexican American (if that is the country of their heritage). The majority of these second and third generation students are not fluent in Spanish - often speaking a form of Spanglish (a mix of Spanish and English words). This lack of fluency can be seen to weaken their personal claim to Mexican heritage, because they have a lower level of Spanish proficiency. With their Mexican heritage being a source of great pride for them, this can adversely affect the identity of these adolescents, who are developmentally working on understanding who they are. In today's political climate, speaking Spanish in an English dominant society can also be viewed negatively, because the Spanish language is at times connected with undocumented immigration. Wouldn't it be amazing if we could empower these students to master their language skills in Spanish by being fully literate, so they are informed and proud of their heritage?

Research on students' perceptions about themselves showed that students with low self concepts avoided doing what they perceived to be difficult tasks and those with high



self concepts took a chance and challenged themselves. Motivation is a subject that often arises in our middle school ESL teacher Professional Learning Committee. As a group we notice that this matter of self concept is one that we believe to be extremely relevant when it comes to motivation. Spanish heritage language students tend to come from low socio-economic backgrounds and do not have role models who completed a high school education or who went on to college. Those that did finish a college education have moved out of their neighborhoods, so school-age students don't get to see the lifestyle change that an education can bring. Consequently, the attitude of not trying because it doesn't matter anyway is incredibly difficult to overcome. If we empower these students with literacy in their own language, which will then feed into improved academic achievement in English and potentially other areas, we may be able to break this cycle and positively impact the achievement gap. That is why the EL secondary PLC have pushed so hard to have the Spanish for Heritage Learners class at all high schools in our district. I would like to see these classes in middle schools, so we can impact these students before high school when the stakes are a little higher.

In District 500's high schools, the Spanish for Heritage Learners class is taught 100% in Spanish and works on the development of students' linguistic skills - enhancing those oral language skills they already have and increasing their literacy using texts through the lens of cultural practices and Central/South American history. **SLIDE 7** This quote in a Spotlight article that featured some of our students sums up the goal of these classes beautifully:

*“XXX and XXX from XXX High School said, “For us, being in this class means that we can discover more about our Hispanic culture, and our identity as Hispanics in our community and we know that our voice should be taken into account. We can be great global citizens.”*

In our high schools, Spanish for Heritage Learners comes under World Languages with teachers being fluent Spanish speakers. This does not have to be the case for middle schools because we are not restricted by curricula and credits as is the case for high school. This elective could certainly fall under the World Languages department with possibly a study skills class on the opposite day or it could be a daily class.

Essential to the introduction of a Spanish for Heritage Learners class would be research considerations, so that we could measure data and compare that to the anticipated results. There are many research opportunities that could arise out of a pilot program in middle school, which could be analyzed by teachers working on Master’s or Doctorate degrees. A longitudinal study should be started that follows these learners through the next six years of heritage language learning. During that time, measurements should be taken of grades across a variety of their classes, and test results, namely state language proficiency tests like ACCESS for WIDA, if applicable, and standardized testing in English and Math. A control group should also be established of students who do not choose to take the Heritage Language for Spanish speakers class. In that way we can make direct comparisons across data points, using a control group. A further idea would be to use a control group who only took this class in high school and compare their results against those who started their Spanish literacy journey in middle school. With

regards to measuring other advantages, in particular those of increasing academic self concept and motivation, a system of qualitative research would need to be established.

Thank you so much for your time and attention today. I know that you share my excitement about this opportunity for middle school Spanish speakers. Imagine the pride on students' faces as they begin to read and write in their own language and learn about Latinx world leaders, thinkers and influencers. Their academic achievements could grow and increase the percentage of graduating Spanish speakers from high school. Then imagine our pride as they pass the bilingual seals of distinction in Spanish, after having had the opportunity to study the language for five years, and go onto college or careers where their bilingual skills are highly lauded. The opportunity for middle school EL students to partake in a Spanish for Heritage Learners class could turn their world around.

**SLIDE 8**

(District number and school names are pseudonyms).

## Appendix D

### **Student presentation, assuming that Spanish for Heritage Learners class is approved:**

#### **Link to Accompanying Google Slides:**

**[https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1YhNMneQsstlSvy7VAPBn-yDwE5rC5k9TFmmtrN\\_ZEV4/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1YhNMneQsstlSvy7VAPBn-yDwE5rC5k9TFmmtrN_ZEV4/edit?usp=sharing)**

We are here today to talk to you about an exciting new elective for Spanish speakers at Orchard Tree Middle School called Spanish for Heritage Learners. You will be able to decide if this is a class you are interested in for 7th and 8th grade. This class involves many elements, however, the one I believe you will be most interested in is that you will be learning to read and write in Spanish. **SLIDE 2** I will introduce the class to you and let you know about the curriculum, then I will give you some solid reasons why selecting this elective is so important. I also have with me two former students who are now in high school and are taking a similar class at the high school level. They will be able to tell you a little bit about their experience. I believe this class will also help you improve in other classes in school - in fact, I researched on this subject for my master's degree in teaching and will share some of that with you today. So, let's get started and find out about the Spanish for Heritage Learners elective.

This class is designed for Spanish speakers who speak Spanish at home, but may need to develop their skills in reading and writing. You are heritage learners, which means that the first language you learned at home was Spanish, which is the language of your

family. Heritage is another word that describes family. You speak Spanish, yet you learned English as a second language and learned to read and write in English. You have wonderful language skills and being bilingual will help you greatly in college and in your future careers. You are not yet fully bilingual, because you need to learn to read and write in Spanish. You are very skillful at speaking Spanish socially, which means with your friends and family, and can do the same in English. There is another kind of language that we talk about in school and that is academic language, sometimes called the language of school. This includes longer, more specific words that connect with a school subject. All students, whether they were brought up speaking English or Spanish, or Somali, are academic language learners. **SLIDE 3** Look at this slide for some examples. You might ask your friends, “What did you get on that Math test?” or “What is your favorite class in school?” This is social language. Compare that to writing or speaking the following, “Compare and contrast Math class to English class.” This is an example of academic language - do you hear how much more formal that sounds? In Spanish for Heritage Learners, you will learn how to speak and write in academic language in Spanish, which is challenging, but will have a huge impact on your success at school.

So, how do we teach you to read and write in Spanish and to work on academic language? **SLIDE 4** The class is taught 100% in Spanish and will focus on reading and writing in Spanish. You already have strong speaking and listening skills and this class will help you to improve your academic language in those areas. This class will use original Spanish texts from a variety of different Central and Latin American countries. You will learn about important people and communities that have influenced the history

and culture of the United States. You will also learn more about your family's culture and heritage. The academic language skills that you learn will help you with future success in school, in colleges and careers. As fully bilingual speakers, companies and organizations will want you to work for them and will choose you over a monolingual person (someone who speaks only one language). Another fun consequence of this class is that when you are in high school, you will have the option to take the Bilingual Seals exam, which can award college credits (free tuition) to bilingual students. **SLIDE 5**

I mentioned earlier about my research into this subject and I learned that by learning to read and write in Spanish, you will improve in your English skills also. Many college people have done research studies and proved that to happen!

So, I have given you some great reasons to sign up for this elective and will be sending information home with you in Spanish and English for your families to look at. Do you have any questions for our friends here from high school about what the class will be like and what you will learn? **SLIDE 6**

(School name is a pseudonym).

## Appendix E (a.)

### Parent presentation in English

**Link to Accompanying Google Slides:**

**<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1zAb1NdEjLpdW7Uk24rMXFnXN8nHe0poLSry-r1ARw9w/edit?usp=sharing>**

Thank you so much for taking time to come to school today. I am very excited to share with you a wonderful Spanish learning opportunity for your children. In the past, I have often been asked by our Spanish speaking students why they cannot take Spanish as an elective class in 7th and 8th grade. **SLIDE 2** It is difficult to explain to them that the type of Spanish class they need is very different from the Spanish as a world language that we teach here at school. Your children are already Spanish speakers and have a high oral (spoken) skill level in that language. The regular Spanish class we teach at school is for non-Spanish speakers and teaches basic vocabulary to English speakers. I am happy to share that we now offer a Spanish for Heritage Learners class in middle school in District 500. Heritage learners is another term for students who grew up speaking the language of their parents in a country where there is a different dominant language. I am going to give you some information about that class, so you and your child can make an informed decision about the advantages of that class for you. First we will consider the existing language skills your children have, then I will explain what the Spanish for Heritage Learners class is, and then share the advantages your child will benefit from by

taking this class. Please ask any questions you have at any time during this presentation. I also have with me two former students who are now in high school and are taking a similar class at the high school level. They will be able to share their own experiences with this class. My goal is that at the end of our time together today, you will feel confident in signing up your children for this new elective class in middle school.

Introducing this class in middle school is the culmination of my master's degree capstone project which was to research the advantages of offering a 'Spanish for Heritage Learners' class as an elective to Spanish speaking students in middle school. Following a presentation to the School Board, our district has agreed to trial the class at Orchard Tree Middle School.

Let's start by affirming that your students are in an amazing position to launch themselves into colleges and careers as bilingual speakers of Spanish and English. They already have strong social language in both. However, the majority of them are missing the literacy piece - they have not learned how to read or write in Spanish. The students recognize this - and have asked teachers, myself included, for a class where they can learn to read and write in their first language. They are not yet fully bilingual and will only be so when they can read and write in Spanish. There is another kind of language that we focus on in school called academic language. **SLIDE 3** It is the language of school and is a more formal language. All students are academic language learners. This language is more challenging for second language speakers because these are not regularly used words and some words they have probably never heard of before. So, students are not only working on how to read and write, but also are learning how to read



and write using academic language so they can be successful in school, college, and beyond.

Every high school in our district now offers a class for Spanish heritage learners, the goal of which is to help students move towards being fully bilingual. We are now delighted to share that this class is available in middle school and is being trialed here in this school.

**SLIDE 4** The Spanish for Heritage Learners class will be taught 100% in Spanish and works on the development of our students' existing linguistic skills. Your children already have strong oral skills, both in listening and speaking, however, they are for the most part unable to read or write in Spanish. **SLIDE 5** In this class, we will enhance their oral language skills and introduce reading and writing in Spanish, using original Spanish texts from a variety of different Central and Latin American countries. These texts will focus on their culture and family heritage. Students will also be able to understand how Hispanic cultures have impacted the United States, by learning about different communities, and also about key individuals, events or artifacts that have shaped the United States. **SLIDE 6** Students will also learn academic language skills to use in colleges and professional settings, so they can become fully bilingual, making them valuable employees in today's global economy and job market. **SLIDE 7** Another great opportunity is that once students are in high school, they have the option to take the Bilingual Seals exam, which can award college credits (free tuition) to bilingual students.

**SLIDE 8** Did you know that the graduation rate for Hispanic students is the lowest across the racial groups at high schools in District 500? It is only XX%, compared to

XX% for White students and XX% for Black students. There are many reasons for this disparity, but one that stands out to teachers is that most of these students learned English as their second language. Spanish is their first language and until they started in elementary school was probably the majority of language that they heard. Then they were taught to read in English - think about how difficult that is when you don't know what the English words mean.

The academic benefits of teaching students to read in their home language are numerous. **SLIDE 9** There are many research studies stating that if we teach children how to read in their first language, they will have better outcomes in literacy in their second language (in this case, English), so should be stronger readers in English. One long-term study showed that children enrolled in first language literacy programs had better or equal achievements than peers not enrolled in first language literacy programs. One research study I looked at said that by fifth grade, Spanish speakers could read grade level words correctly, but did not understand what the words meant - they were about two-three grades behind on comprehension. This is partly why they are underperforming.

**SLIDE 10** Another reason for choosing the Spanish for Heritage Learners is to help your children understand who they are in this multicultural society we live in, and to have confidence in their home language. All children going through adolescence are working out who they are as individuals and where they fit into society. Speaking more than one language and having more than one nationality can make this increasingly challenging. Students feel more capable in one language than another, and that might affect how they see themselves - for example, they might ask if they can really call themselves Mexican if

they can't read in Spanish? If they have a low opinion of their Spanish skills, this spills over into other academic areas which research has shown can stop them from trying more difficult tasks in the classroom. This can then lead to a motivation problem - why bother trying if it's too difficult? The Spanish for Heritage Learners class addresses identity and the influence that Spanish speaking countries and people have had on the United States. The goal of this class is to increase student confidence by teaching how to read and write through authentic literature. **SLIDE 11** This quote from current high school students captures the success of this class.

*“For us, being in this class means that we can discover more about our Hispanic culture, and our identity as Hispanics in our community, and we know that our voice should be taken into account. We can be great global citizens.”*

Students  
Spotlight, Spring 2019.

With the extension of this class into middle school, District 500 is now a leader in bilingual education in our state. We hope that by improving our students' literacy in their first language of Spanish, that the academic achievement in their second language, English, will be improved. In offering Spanish for Heritage Learners, this District is working towards the goal of graduating students who are fully bilingual into our colleges and beyond, while also encouraging the self confidence and motivation of these students.

We encourage you to speak to your child about choosing Spanish for Heritage Learners as an elective class in 7th and 8th grade. Information about elective classes will be going home next week in both Spanish and English classes. In the meantime, if you

have any questions about the class or our presentation today, I would be happy to help.

**SLIDE 12**

(District number and school names are pseudonyms).

**Appendix E (b.)****Parent presentation in Spanish or Presentación a los padres  
(Translated by L Moya)**

Muchísimas gracias por tomarse el tiempo de venir a la escuela el día de hoy. Estoy sumamente feliz de compartir con ustedes una fantástica oportunidad de aprendizaje del idioma español diseñada con sus hijos en mente. Muchas veces los estudiantes que hablan español me han preguntado por qué no pueden tomar Español como una de sus clases electivas en el 7<sup>mo</sup> u 8<sup>vo</sup> grado. Es difícil explicarles que el tipo de clase de español que ellos necesitan es muy diferente a la que enseñamos acá en la escuela intermedia como asignatura de Lenguajes del Mundo. Sus hijos ya hablan el español y tienen un nivel alto de las habilidades orales (o habladas). La clase regular de español que enseñamos en la escuela es para chicos que no lo hablan y enseña el vocabulario básico. Me complace informarles que ahora el Distrito ofrecerá una clase llamada *Spanish for Heritage Learners* “Español para estudiantes de herencia habla hispana” en una de las escuela intermedia/secundaria. Estudiantes de Herencia es otro término que se usa para describir a los estudiantes que han crecido hablando el idioma de sus padres en un país en el cual hay una lengua dominante distinta. Yo les voy a dar información sobre esta clase de manera que ustedes y sus hijos puedan tomar una decisión informada sobre sus ventajas. Comenzaremos considerando las habilidades de lenguaje que el estudiante tiene, luego les explicaré de qué se trata la clase de Español para estudiantes de herencia habla hispana y finalmente hablaré sobre las ventajas que sus hijos recibirán al tomar esta clase.

Por favor hágame cualquier pregunta en cualquier momento durante esta presentación. He invitado a dos estudiantes que ahora están en la preparatoria tomando una clase similar a este nivel, los cuales hablarán de su experiencia en la misma. Mi objetivo es que al final de esta sesión ustedes entiendan lo que significa inscribir a sus hijos en esta nueva clase electiva en la escuela intermedia. La incorporación de esta nueva opción en la escuela intermedia es la culminación del proyecto para mi maestría, la cual era investigar las ventajas de ofrecer una clase de Español para estudiantes de herencia habla hispana como un electivo para estudiantes hispanohablantes de las escuelas intermedias. Luego de una presentación al consejo directivo escolar, nuestro distrito ha accedido implementar dicha clase en la Escuela Orchard Tree Middle School.\*

Empecemos por ratificar que sus hijos cuentan con una maravillosa ventaja para continuar con sus carreras o educación superior al ser bilingües. Ellos ya cuentan con el lenguaje de ámbito social en ambos idiomas, sin embargo, a la mayoría les falta la lectoescritura, es decir que no han aprendido a leer o escribir en español. Los estudiantes están conscientes de esto y han preguntado a maestros incluyéndome a mi, si existe una clase donde ellos puedan aprender a leer y escribir en su primer idioma. Ellos aún no son completamente bilingües y solamente llegarán a serlo si pueden leer y escribir en español. Hay otro tipo de lenguaje en el que nos enfocamos en la escuela y se llama "lenguaje académico". Este es el lenguaje educativo de la escuela y es más formal. Todos los estudiantes aprenden este lenguaje académico, el cual es un desafío más grande para los estudiantes del inglés como segunda lengua, porque en este lenguaje académico se usan palabras que no son comunes y algunas palabras que quizás jamás hayan escuchado. Por

lo tanto, los estudiantes no solamente desarrollan la lectura y escritura, sino que también el cómo leer y escribir en el lenguaje académico de manera que puedan tener éxito en la escuela, la universidad y más allá.

Todas las escuelas preparatorias de nuestro distrito ofrecen ahora Español para estudiantes de herencia habla hispana y el objetivo es ayudarles a los estudiantes a llegar a ser completamente bilingües. Estamos dichosos de poder contarles que esta clase ahora se ofrecerá a nivel intermedio, y que será se le está dando marcha blanca en esta escuela.

Los estudiantes de esta clase recibirán 100% de instrucción en español y el objetivo es desarrollar las habilidades lingüísticas que los estudiantes ya poseen. Sus hijos ya tienen fuertes habilidades en el ámbito oral, tanto al escuchar como al hablar, pero por lo general no pueden leer o escribir en español. En esta clase aumentaremos las habilidades del lenguaje y presentaremos la lectura y escritura en español usando textos originalmente escritos en español que provienen de una variedad de países de Latinoamérica.

Estos textos se enfocarán en su cultura y herencia familiar. Ellos también podrán entender cómo la cultura hispana ha tenido un impacto en los Estados Unidos al aprender sobre diferentes comunidades y al hablar sobre ciertas personas claves, eventos y artefactos que han dejado una huella en los EE.UU. Los estudiantes también aprenderán las habilidades del lenguaje académico que se usan en los ámbitos universitarios y profesionales, de manera que lleguen a ser completamente bilingües y haciendo que se conviertan en empleados más valiosos en los actuales mercados de trabajo y economía global. Otro beneficio resultado de estas clases es la oportunidad que los estudiantes tendrán en la

escuela preparatoria, donde tendrán la opción de tomar el examen *Bilingual Seals* (Sellos Bilingües), el cual otorga créditos universitarios gratuitos a los estudiantes bilingües.

¿Sabía usted que la tasa de graduación para los estudiantes latinos es la más baja dentro de los grupos raciales en las escuelas preparatorias del Distrito 500? Solamente un XX% de los estudiantes latinos se gradúa, comparado con un XX% de los estudiantes blancos y un XX% de los estudiantes afroamericanos. Hay muchas razones para esta disparidad, pero hay una que nos llama la atención como maestros y es que la mayoría de estos estudiantes han aprendido el inglés como segunda lengua. El español es su primera lengua y la que escucharon hasta que empezaron la escuela primaria. Y luego a ellos les enseñaron a leer en inglés -- piensen en lo difícil que es cuando no se saben lo que significan las palabras en inglés.

Los beneficios académicos al enseñarles a los estudiantes a leer en el idioma de su hogar son numerosos. Hay muchos estudios de investigación que afirman que si les enseñamos a leer a los niños en su primer idioma, ellos tendrán un mejor rendimiento en la lectoescritura en un segundo idioma (en este caso, el inglés), por lo tanto ellos deberían ser mejores lectores en inglés. Yo leí sobre un estudio a largo plazo que mostraba que los niños que estaban inscritos en programas de lectoescritura en su primer idioma obtenían mejores o iguales logros que sus compañeros que no lo habían hecho. Otro estudio que yo revisé decía que para el 5<sup>to</sup> grado, los hispanohablantes podían leer palabras del 5<sup>to</sup> grado en forma correcta pero sin saber su significado -o sea que estaban retrasados dos o tres grados en lo que se refiere a comprensión de lectura. Esto explica parcialmente por qué el rendimiento de ellos se encuentra por debajo de lo esperado.



Otra razón para escoger esta clase de Español es porque ayuda a sus hijos a que entiendan quiénes son en esta sociedad multicultural en la que viven y a obtener confianza sobre la forma en que hablan el idioma de su hogar. Todos los niños que están pasando por la adolescencia están tratando de entender quiénes son como individuos y buscando su lugar en la sociedad. El hablar más de un idioma y el tener más de una nacionalidad pueden hacer que este proceso sea más desafiante. Los estudiantes se sienten más capaces en un idioma que en el otro, lo cual puede afectar la manera en que ellos se ven a sí mismos - por ejemplo, podrían preguntarse ¿puedo llamarme realmente mexicano solamente cuando puedo hablar bien el español? Si ellos tienen una baja opinión de sus habilidades al hablar español, esto puede verse reflejado en otras áreas académicas y hay estudios que muestran impedimentos al ejecutar tareas más difíciles en el salón de clases. Esto puede llevar a un problema de motivación - ¿para qué esforzarme en algo que es tan difícil? Los estudiantes de la clase de Español para estudiantes de herencia habla hispana se plantean la identidad y la influencia que personas y países como los de ellos y sus padres han tendido en los Estados Unidos. El objetivo es aumentar su confianza al enseñarles a leer y escribir a través de literatura auténtica. La siguiente cita de un estudiante de la escuela preparatoria capta el éxito de esta clase.

*“Para nosotros, estar en esta clase significa que podemos descubrir más sobre la cultura hispana y sobre nuestra identidad como hispanos en nuestra comunidad y sabemos que nuestra voz será considerada. Todos somos ciudadanos globales fantásticos”.*

Estudiantes  
Spotlight, Primavera 2019.

Con la extensión de esta clase en la escuela intermedia, el Distrito 500 es ahora un líder en la educación bilingüe de nuestro estado. Esperamos que al mejorar las habilidades de lectoescritura en el primer idioma de nuestros estudiantes que hablan español, el rendimiento académico en su segundo idioma, el inglés, mejorará. Al ofrecer la clase *Español para estudiantes de herencia habla hispana*, este distrito está intentando lograr el objetivo de graduar estudiantes que sean completamente bilingües, que vayan a la universidad y más allá, y al tiempo que fomentar la confianza en sí mismos y la motivación de estos estudiantes.

Les recomendamos hablar con sus hijos sobre la elección de la clase Español para estudiantes de herencia habla hispana como opción electiva de 7<sup>mo</sup> y 8<sup>vo</sup> grados. La próxima semana se enviará a casa información sobre los electivos en español e inglés. Mientras tanto, si ustedes tienen preguntas sobre la clase o sobre nuestra presentación, yo estaría dispuesta a ayudarlos.

## Appendix F

### Post presentation questionnaire

<https://forms.gle/qPJUD4nbcR2ymdBN8>